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THE STILLWELL DEGRAVITATOR
by CHARLES R. TANNER

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LIFE ON URANUS

By HENRY GADE

(See cover painting by Frank R. Paul)

On our cover this month we present the artist's conception of the inhabitants of the planet Uranus, deduced in imagination from scientific facts about that world as astronomers know them

URANUS is one of the four major planets and therefore, one of the four upon which the most strange conditions of theoretical life must exist.

Before attempting to picture the life form the planet might possess, we must consider the facts, meagre indeed, known about the giant world.

First, it is the seventh planet in distance from the sun, revolving in an orbit at a mean distance of 1,782,800,000 miles. It takes 84 years to complete its voyage over its orbit. Its diameter is 30,900 miles or nearly four times that of earth. However, its mass is only 14.6 times that of earth, which places its density at 0.25 that of our own planet, and 1.36 that of water.

From these facts we must deduce that it has a great proportion of gaseous elements in its makeup, probably indicating a tremendously thick blanket of atmosphere, of many kinds of gases, most of them poisonous.

However, its great distance from the sun means it must be a cold world, and we may find the surface of the planet, consisting of a great quantity of liquid, frozen to a great depth. There would be some land areas, probably crystalline or metallic (aluminum, bismuth, etc.) in formation, and rather impracticable as a means of supporting life.

Uranus is a pale, sea-green in color, which may come from its atmospheric blanket entirely, or from its watery surface, visible through the atmosphere. There is no reason to assume that we could not observe the surface through the atmosphere even though it were extremely dense, because the cold world would result in clarity through precipitation of foreign and non-gaseous elements in suspension, and in the lack of precipitation of a liquid nature, or even rare snowstorms.

Bearing all these facts in mind, let us voyage to Uranus and land our space ship on the frozen surface, after a perilous journey through an atmosphere that is dense enough to cause us great worry as we cut down our speed to avoid overheating from friction.

Finally, however, we land. We find it necessary to wear our space suits, and perhaps we have our anti-gravity shoes on. We'd have trouble carrying our 400 pounds of weight, if we didn't don them.

We carry a weapon, because we've noticed some very peculiar metal domes sticking up out of the icy terrain. It is evident that it never melts, and the structures seem quite permanent. However, we won't be too sure, because it's "winter" where we have landed, and these things look as though they would float if the ice melted. No telling what we'll find inside. Or what will emerge to greet us.

We walk through the thin, powdery snow, and we pass one of the metal domes. It's hollow, but there's no answer to our pounding. We pass on. But we've been observed. The next dome opens, startling us. Peering at us, we see a queer metal being. No, he's not metal. It's a suit he's wearing. He remains motionless, regarding us with a cold stare. We come closer.

We see a queer, tiny green-furred being. He seems unafraid. But we feel certain that he'll pop down if we make an overt move, and slam his dome down over him again. Reminds us of a ferret, somehow.

Approaching, we signify by sign language that we intend no harm, and we descend into the interior of the Uranian's queer home. We are amazed. We find a veritable little city, all self-contained in metal.

Here is a frozen world with all the elements that would force a living being to develop scientifically in the struggle for existence.

He has built himself a home fitted with all the comforts possible. Air-lock, to keep out the poisonous outer atmosphere. Air purifying plants, furnishing an atmosphere much too heavy for us to breathe, although the Uranian now takes off his suit and reveals himself as a squat, little fellow, with webbed legs, short and powerful, and tiny, many fingered hands, with webbing between them.

Obviously, he is partly amphibian. We learn to our astonishment that he is able to descend below the ice crust of the planet, and swim like a seal in the water below, where grows his food supply. These are mostly seaweed, small fishes, and jelly-fish.

Down below, the water is warm, in fact, it becomes hot at great depths, because Uranus' great bulk retains much of its original heat. It is only the surface that is frozen.

At times, we learn, the heat increases, and the ice melts, allowing steam to escape, and accounting for the strange white bands in the atmosphere noticed by Earth astronomers through their telescopes. This also accounts for the snow we find outside.

It is down here that the Uranian really lives, and we find that he can breathe directly in the water with a set of gills.

Also it is here that the mating takes place. The eggs are deposited in the warm waters, in clumps of floating weeds, and there hatch, to develop into tadpole-like creatures which develop later into the full-grown quasi-amphibian Uranian.

Evolution has driven this being to prepare himself for an ultimate life on a world which will be entirely frozen, and the watery underworld no longer exists as the planet loses its natural heat.

Thus, the city we entered is the forerunner of Uranian surface cities built on everlasting ice. At present they are temporary affairs, capable of floating at the season of melting.

Peculiarly, of all four giant worlds, Uranus is the one most fitted to support an intelligent form of life, and it is a world where we can expect to find such life with more assurance than we would anywhere else in the solar system with the exception of young Venus, and aging Mars.

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A GREAT NEW COLLECTION

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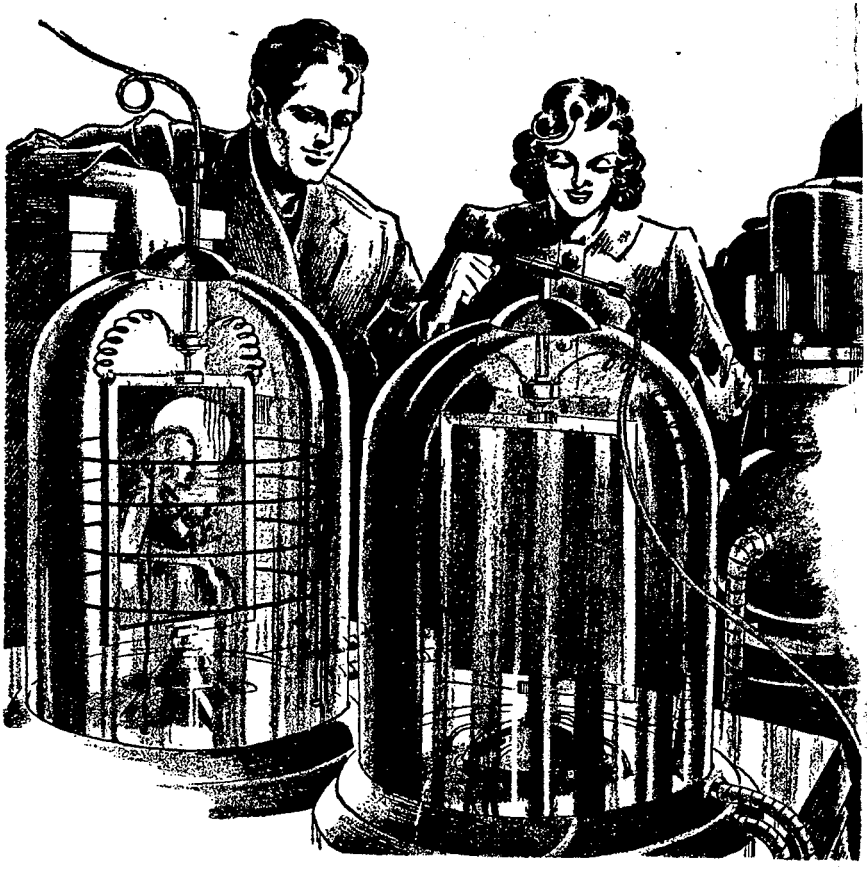
The 4-Sided Triangle

By William F. Temple

When Joan Leeton decided to marry Will Fredericks, life went dark for Bill Josephs. Then his science showed him how to add another side to the eternal triangle, and his problem seemed solved, until . . .



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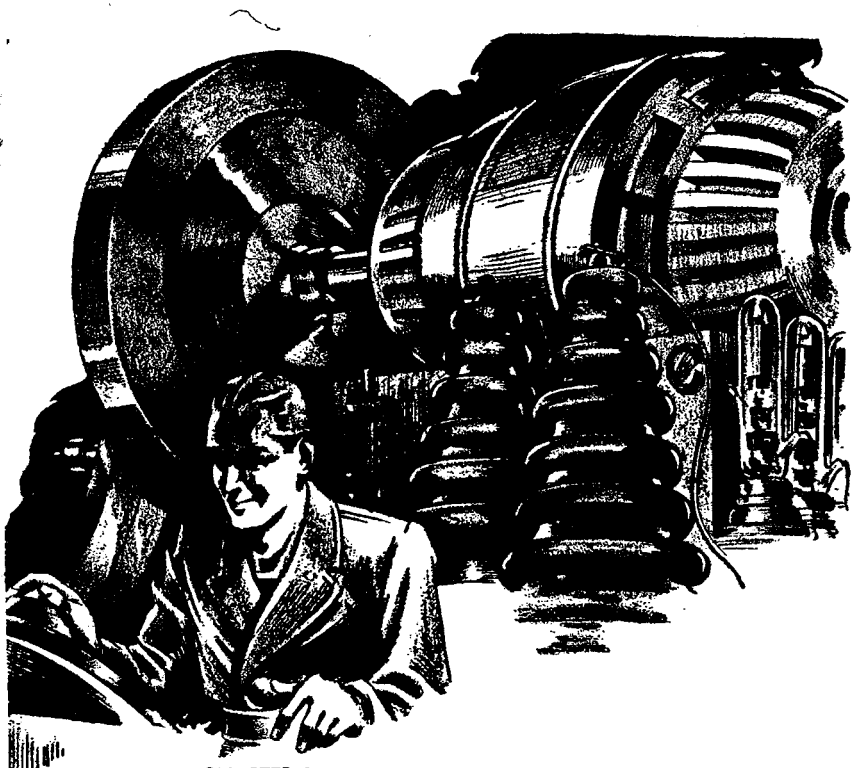

CHAPTER I

Madame Croignette's Double

THREE people peered through a quartz window.

The girl was squashed uncomfortably between the two men, but at the moment neither she nor they cared. The object they were watching was too interesting.

The girl was Joan Leeton. Her hair was an indeterminate brown, and owed its curls to tongs, not to nature. Her eyes were certainly brown, and bright with unquenchable good humor. In repose her face was undistinguished, though far from plain; when she smiled, it was beautiful.

Her greatest attraction (and it was part of her attraction that she did not realize it) lay in her character. She was soothingly sympathetic without becoming mushy, she was very level-headed (a rare thing in a woman) and completely unselfish. She refused to lose her temper over anything, or take offense, or enlarge upon the truth in her favor, and yet she was tolerant of such lapses in others. She possessed a brain that was unusually able in its dealings with science, and yet her tastes and pleasures were simple.

William Fredericks (called "Will") had much in common with Joan, but his sympathy was a little more disinterested, his humor less spontaneous, and he had certain prejudices. His tastes were reserved for what he considered the more worthy things. But he was

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calm and good-tempered, and his steadiness of purpose was reassuring. He was black-haired, with an expression of quiet content.

William Josephs (called "Bill") was different. He was completely unstable. Fiery of hair, he was alternately fiery and depressed of spirit. Impulsive, generous, highly emotional about art and music, he was given to periods of gaiety and moods of black melancholia. He reached, at his best, heights of mental brilliance far beyond the other two, but long bouts of lethargy prevented him from making the best of them.

Nevertheless, his sense of humor was keen, and he was often amused at his own absurdly over-sensitive character; but he could not change it.

Both these men were deeply in love with Joan, and both tried hard to conceal it. If Joan had any preference, she concealed it just as ably, although they were aware that she was fond of both of them.

The quartz window, through which the three were looking, was set in a tall metal container, and just a few feet away was another container, identical even to the thickness of the window-glass.

Overhead was a complex assemblage of apparatus: bulbous, silvered tubes, small electric motors that hummed in various unexpected places, makeshift screens of zinc, roughly soldered, coils upon coils of wire, and a network of slung cables that made the place look like a creeper-tangled tropical jungle. A large dynamo churned out a steady roar in the corner, and a pair of wide sparkgaps crackled continuously, filling the laboratory with a weird, jumping blue light as the day waned outside the windows and the dusk crept in.

An intruder in the laboratory might have looked through the window of the other container and seen, standing on a steel frame in a cubical chamber, an oil painting of "Madame Croignette" by Boucher, delicately illuminated by concealed lights. He would not have known it, but the painting was standing in a vacuum.

If he had squeezed behind the trio at the other container and gazed through their window he would have seen an apparently identical sight: an oil painting of "Madame Croignette" by Boucher, standing on a steel frame in a vacuum, delicately illuminated by concealed lights.

From which he would probably not gather much.

The catch was that the painting at which the three were gazing so intently was not quite the same as the one in the first container—not yet. There were minute differences in color and proportion.

But gradually these differences were righting themselves, for the whole of the second canvas was being built up atom by atom, molecule by molecule, into an exactly identical twin of the one which had felt the brush of Francois Boucher.

THE marvelously intricate apparatus, using an adaption of a newly-discovered magnetic principle, consumed only a moderate amount of power in arranging the lines of sympathetic fields of force which brought every proton into position and every electron into its respective balancing orbit. It was a machine which could divert the flow of great forces without the ability to tap their energy.

"Any minute now!" breathed Will.

Bill rubbed his breath off the glass impatiently.

"Don't do that!" he said, and promptly fogged the glass over again. Not ungently, he attempted to rub a clear patch with Joan's own pretty

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nose. She exploded into laughter, fogging the glass hopelessly, and in the temporary confusion of this they missed seeing the event they had been waiting days for—the completion of the duplicate painting to the ultimate atom.

The spark-gaps died with a final snap, a lamp sprang into being on the indicator panel, and the dynamo began to run whirringly down to a stop.

They cleaned the window, and there stood "Madame Croignette" looking rather blankly out at them with wide brown eyes that exactly matched the sepia from Boucher's palette, and both beauty spots and every hair of her powdered wig in place to a millionth of a millimetre.

Will turned a valve, and there was the hiss of air rushing into the chamber. He opened the window, and lifted the painting out gingerly, as if he half-expected it to crumble in his hands.

"Perfect—a beauty!" he murmured. He looked up at Joan with shining eyes. Bill caught that look, and unaccountably checked the impulsive whoop of joy he was on the point of letting loose. He coughed instead, and leaned over Joan's shoulder to inspect "Madame Croignette" more closely.

"The gamble's come off," went on Will. "We've sunk every cent into this, but it won't be long before we have enough money to do anything we want to do—anything."

"Anything—except to get Bill out of bed on Sunday mornings," smiled Joan, and they laughed.

"No sensible millionaire would get out of bed any morning," said Bill.

CHAPTER II

Wedding Plans

THE steel and glass factory of Art Replicas, Limited, shone like a diamond up in the green hills of Surrey. In a financial sense, it had actually sprung from a diamond—the sale of a replica of the Koh-i-noor. That had been the one and only product of Precious Stones, Limited, an earlier company which was closed down by the government when they saw that it would destroy the world's diamond market.

A sister company, Radium Products, was going strong up in the north because its scientific necessity was recognized. But the hearts of the three company-directors lay in Art Replicas, and there they spent their time.

Famous works of art from all over the world passed through the factory's portals, and gave birth to innumerable replicas of themselves for distribution and sale at quite reasonable prices.

Families of only moderate means found it pleasing to have a Constable or Turner in the dining-room and a Rodin statuette in the hall. And this widely-flung ownership of *objets d'art*, which were to all intents and purposes the genuine articles, strengthened interest in art enormously. When people had lived with these things for a little while, they began to perceive the beauty in them—for real beauty is not always obvious at a glance—and to become greedy for more knowledge of them and the men who originally conceived and shaped them.

So the three directors—Will, Bill, and Joan—put all their energy into satisfying the demands of the world for art, and conscious of their part in furthering civilization, were deeply content.

For a time.

Then Bill, the impatient and easily-bored, broke out one day in the middle of a Directors' Meeting.

"Oh, to hell with the Ming estimates!" he cried, sweeping a pile of orders from the table.

Joan and Will, recognizing the symp-

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toms, exchanged wry glances of amusement.

"Look here," went on Bill, "I don't know what you two think, but I'm fed up! We've become nothing but dull business people now. It isn't our sort of life. Repetition, repetition, repetition! I'm going crazy! We're *research* workers, not darned piece-workers. For heaven's sake, let's start out in some new line."

This little storm relieved him, and almost immediately he smiled too.

"But, really, aren't we?" he appealed.

"Yes," responded Joan and Will in duet.

"Well, what about it?"

Will coughed, and prepared himself.

"Joan and I were talking about that this morning, as a matter of fact," he said. "We were going to suggest that we sell the factory, and retire to our old laboratory and re-equip it."

Bill picked up the ink-pot and emptied it solemnly over the Ming estimates. The ink made a shining lake in the center of the antique and valuable table.

"At last we're sane again," he said. "Now you know the line of investigation I want to open up. I'm perfectly convinced that the reason for our failure to create a living duplicate of any living creature was because the quotiety we assumed for the *xy* action—"

"Just a moment, Bill," interrupted Will. "Before we get on with that work, I—I mean, one of the reasons Joan and me wanted to retire was because—well—"

"What he's trying to say," said Joan quietly, "is that we plan to get married and settle down for a bit before we resume research work."

Bill stared at them. He was aware that his cheeks were slowly reddening. He felt numb.

"Well!" he said. "Well!" (He could think of nothing else. This was unbelievable! He must postpone consideration of it until he was alone, else his utter mortification would show.)

He put out his hand automatically, and they both clasped it.

"You know I wish you every possible happiness," he said, rather huskily. His mind seemed empty. He tried to form some comment, but somehow he could not compose one sentence that made sense.

"I think we'll get on all right," said Will, smiling at Joan. She smiled back at him, and unknowingly cut Bill to the heart.

With an effort, Bill pulled himself together and rang for wine to celebrate. He ordered some of the modern reconstruction of an exceedingly rare '94.

THE night was moonless and cloudless, and the myriads of glittering pale blue points of the Milky Way sprawled across the sky as if someone had cast a handful of brilliants upon a black velvet cloth. But they twinkled steadily, for strong air currents were in motion in the upper atmosphere.

The Surrey lane was dark and silent. The only signs of life were the occasional distant glares of automobile headlights passing on the main highway nearly a mile away, and the red dot of a burning cigarette in a gap between the hedgerows.

The cigarette was Bill's. He sat there on a gate staring up at the array in the heavens and wondering what to do with his life.

He felt completely at sea, purposeless, and unutterably depressed. He had thought the word "heartache" just a vague descriptive term. Now he knew what it meant. It was a solid physical feeling, an ache that tore him inside, unceasingly. He yearned to see Joan,

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to be with Joan, with his whole being. This longing would not let him rest. He could have cried out for a respite.

He tried to argue himself to a more rational viewpoint.

"I am a man of science," he told himself. "Why should I allow old Mother Nature to torture and badger me like this? I can see through all the tricks of that old twister. These feelings are purely chemical reactions, the secretions of the glands mixing with the blood-stream. My mind is surely strong enough to conquer that? Else I have a third-rate brain, not the scientific instrument I've prided myself on."

He stared up at the stars glittering in their seeming calm stability, age-old and unchanging. But were they? They may look just the same when all mankind and its loves and hates had departed from this planet, and left it frozen and dark. But he knew that even as he watched, they were changing position at a frightful speed, receding from him at thousands of miles a second.

"Nature is a twister, full of illusions," he repeated. . . .

There started a train of thought, a merciful anesthetic in which he lost himself for some minutes.

Somewhere down in the deeps of his subconscious an idea which had, unknown to him, been evolving itself for weeks, was stirred, and emerged suddenly into the light. He started, dropped his cigarette, and left it on the ground.

He sat there stiffly on the gate and considered the idea.

It was wild—incredibly wild. But if he worked hard and long at it, there was a chance that it might come off. It would provide a reason for living, anyway, so long as there was any hope at all of success.

He jumped down from the gate and started walking quickly and excitedly along the lane back to the factory. His mind was already turning over possibilities, planning eagerly. In the promise of this new adventure, the heartache was temporarily submerged.

CHAPTER III

An Incredible Proposal

SIX months passed.

Bill had retired to the old laboratory, and spent much of that time enlarging and re-equipping it. He added a rabbit pen, and turned an adjacent patch of ground into burial-ground to dispose of those who died under his knife. This cemetery was like no cemetery in the world, for it was also full of dead things that had never died—because they had never lived.

His research got nowhere. He could build up, atom by atom, the exact physical counterpart of any living animal, but all such duplicates remained obstinately inanimate. They assumed an extraordinary life-like appearance, but it was frozen life. They were no more alive than waxwork images, even though they were as soft and pliable as the original animals in sleep.

Bill thought he had hit upon the trouble in a certain equation, but re-checking confirmed that the equation had been right in the first place. There was no flaw in either theory or practice as far as he could see.

Yet somehow he could not duplicate the force of life in action. Must he apply that force himself? How?

He applied various degrees of electrical impulses to the nerve-centers of the rabbits, tried rapid alternations of temperatures, miniature "iron lungs," vigorous massage—both external and internal — intra-venous and spinal injections of everything from adrenalin

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to even more powerful stimulants which his agile mind concocted. And still the artificial rabbits remained limp bundles of fur.

Joan and Will returned from their honeymoon and settled down in a roomy, comfortable old house a few miles away. They sometimes dropped in to see how the research was going. Bill always seemed bright and cheerful enough when they came, and joked about his setbacks.

"I think I'll scour the world for the hottest thing in female bunnies and teach her to do a hula-hula on the lab. bench," he said. "That ought to make some of these stiffs sit up!"

Joan said she was seriously thinking of starting an eating-house specializing in rabbit pie, if Bill could keep up the supply of dead rabbits. He replied that he'd already buried enough to feed an army.

Their conversation was generally pitched in this bantering key, save when they really got down to technicalities. But when they had gone, Bill would sit and brood, thinking constantly of Joan. And he could concentrate on nothing else for the rest of that day.

FINALLY, more or less by accident, he found the press-button which awoke life in the rabbits. He was experimenting with a blood solution he had prepared, thinking that it might remain more constant than the natural rabbits' blood, which became thin and useless too quickly. He had constructed a little pump to force the natural blood from a rabbit's veins and fill them instead with his artificial solution.

The pump had not been going for more than a few seconds before the rabbit stirred weakly and opened its eyes. It twitched its nose, and lay quite still for a moment, save for one foot which continued to quiver.

Then suddenly it roused up and made a prodigious bound from the bench. The thin rubber tubes which tethered it by the neck parted in mid-air, and it fell awkwardly with a heavy thump on the floor. The blood continued to run from one of the broken tubes, but the pump which forced it out was the rabbit's own heart—beating at last.

The animal seemed to have used all its energy in that one powerful jump, and lay still on the floor and quietly expired.

Bill stood regarding it, his fingers still on the wheel of the pump.*

Then when he realized what it meant, he recaptured some of his old exuberance, and danced around the laboratory carrying a carboy of acid as though it were a Grecian urn.

Further experiments convinced him that he had set foot within the portals of Nature's mostly carefully guarded citadel. Admittedly he could not himself create anything original or unique in Life. But he could create a living image of any living creature under the sun.

A HOT summer afternoon, a cool green lawn shaded by elms and on it two white-clad figures, Joan and Will, putting through their miniature nine-hole course. A bright-striped awning by the hedge, and below it, two comfortable canvas chairs and a little Moorish table with soft drinks. An ivy-covered wall of an old red-brick mansion showing between the trees. The indefinable smell of new-cut grass in the air. The gentle but triumphant laughter of Joan as Will foozled his shot.

That was the atmosphere Bill en-

* The only practical way of setting a stagnant circulation in motion. Pump the blood until the heart-pump works in sympathy.—Author.

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tered at the end of his duty tramp along the lane from the laboratory—it was his first outdoor excursion for weeks—and he could not help comparing it with the sort of world he had been living in: the benches and bottles and sinks, the eye-tiring field of the microscope, the sheets of calculations under the glare of electric light in the dark hours of the night, the smell of blood and chemicals and rabbits.

And he realized completely that science itself wasn't the greatest thing in life. Personal happiness was. That was the goal of all men, whatever way they strove to reach it.

Joan caught sight of him standing on the edge of the lawn, and came hurrying across to greet him.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked. "We've been dying to hear how you've been getting on."

"I've done it," said Bill.

"Done it? Have you really?" Her voice mounted excitedly almost to a squeak. She grabbed him by the wrist and hauled him across to Will. "He's done it!" she announced, and stood between them, watching both their faces eagerly.

Will took the news with his usual calmness, and smilingly gripped Bill's hand.

"Congratulations, old lad," he said. "Come and have a drink and tell us all about it."

They squatted on the grass and helped themselves from the table. Will could see that Bill had been overworking himself badly. His face was drawn and tired, his eyelids red, and he was in the grip of a nervous tension which for the time held him dumb and uncertain of himself.

Joan noticed this, too, and checked the questions she was going to bombard upon him. Instead, she quietly withdrew to the house to prepare a pot of the China tea which she knew always soothed Bill's migraine.

When she had gone, Bill, with an effort, shook some of the stupor from him, and looked across at Will. His gaze dropped, and he began to pluck idly at the grass.

"Will," he began, presently, "I—" He cleared his throat nervously, and started again in a none too steady voice. "Listen, Will, I have something a bit difficult to say, and I'm not so good at expressing myself. In the first place, I have always been crazily in love with Joan."

Will sat up, and looked at him curiously. But he let Bill go on.

"I never said anything because—well, because I was afraid I wouldn't make a success of marriage. Too unstable to settle down quietly with a decent girl like Joan. But I found I couldn't go on without her, and was going to propose—when you beat me to it. I've felt pretty miserable since, though this work has taken something of the edge off."

Will regarded the other's pale face—and wondered.

"This work held out a real hope to me. And now I've accomplished the major part of it. I can make a living copy of any living thing. Now—do you see *why* I threw myself into this research? *I want to create a living, breathing twin of Joan, and marry her!*"

Will started slightly. Bill got up and paced restlessly up and down.

"I know I'm asking a hell of a lot. This affair reaches deeper than scientific curiosity. No feeling man can contemplate such a proposal without misgivings, for his wife and for himself. But honestly, Will, I cannot see any possible harm arising from it. Though, admittedly, the only good would be to make a selfish man happy. For

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heaven's sake, let me know what you think."

Will sat contemplating, while the distracted Bill continued to pace.

Presently, he said: "You are sure no physical harm could come to Joan in the course of the experiment?"

"Certain—completely certain," said Bill.

"Then I personally have no objection. Anything but objection. I had no idea you felt that way, Bill, and it would make me, as well as Joan, very unhappy to know you had to go on like that."

He caught sight of his wife approaching with a laden tray.

"Naturally, the decision rests with her," he said. "If she'd rather not, there's no more to it."

"No, of course not," agreed Bill.

But they both knew what her answer would be.

CHAPTER IV

"Doll"

"STOP the car for a minute, Will," said Joan suddenly, and her husband stepped on the foot-brake.

The car halted in the lane on the brow of the hill. Through a gap in the hedge the two occupants had a view of Bill's laboratory as it lay below in the cradle of the valley.

Joan pointed down. In the field behind the "cemetery" two figures were strolling. Even at this distance, Bill's flaming hair marked his identity. His companion was a woman in a white summer frock. And it was on her that Joan's attention was fixed.

"She's alive now!" she whispered, and her voice trembled slightly.

Will nodded. He noticed her apprehension, and gripped her hand encouragingly. She managed a wry smile.

"It's not every day one goes to pay a visit to oneself," she said. "It was unnerving enough last week to see her lying on the other couch in the lab., dressed in my red frock—which *I* was wearing—so pale, and—Oh, it was like seeing myself dead!"

"She's not dead now, and Bill's bought her some different clothes, so cheer up," said Will. "I know it's a most queer situation, but the only possible way to look at it is from the scientific viewpoint. It's a unique scientific event. And it's made Bill happy into the bargain."

He ruminated a minute.

"Wish he'd given us a hint as to how he works his resuscitation process, though," he went on. "Still, I suppose he's right to keep it a secret. It's a discovery which could be appallingly abused. Think of dictators manufacturing loyal, stupid armies from one loyal, stupid soldier! Or industrialists manufacturing cheap labor! We should soon have a world of robots, all traces of individuality wiped out. No variety, nothing unique — life would not be worth living."

"No," replied Joan, mechanically, her thoughts still on that white-clad figure down there.

Will released the brake, and the car rolled down the hill toward the laboratory. The two in the field saw it coming, and walked back through the cemetery to meet it. They reached the road as the car drew up.

"Hello, there!" greeted Bill. "You're late—we've had the kettle on the boil for half an hour. Doll* and I were getting anxious."

He advanced into the road, and the woman in the white frock lingered

* "Doll" was the name he had chosen for Joan II, as he had told them on the 'phone in the morning when he had invited them to come to tea and meet her.—Author.

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hesitantly behind him. Joan tightened her lips and braced herself to face this unusual ordeal. She got out of the car, and while Will and Bill were grasping hands, she walked to meet her now living twin.

Apparently Doll had decided to face it in the same way, and they met with oddly identical expressions of smiling surface ease, with an undercurrent of curiosity and doubt. They both saw and understood each other's expression simultaneously, and burst out laughing. That helped a lot.

"It's not so bad, after all," said Doll, and Joan checked herself from making the same instinctive remark.

"No, not nearly," she agreed.

And it wasn't. For although Doll looked familiar to her, she could not seem to identify her with herself to any unusual extent. It was not that her apparel and hair-style were different, but that somehow her face, figure, and voice seemed like those of another person.

She did not realize that hitherto she had only seen parts of herself in certain mirrors from certain angles, and the complete effect was something she had simply never witnessed.* Nor that she had not heard her own voice outside her own head, so to speak—never from a distance of some feet.

Nevertheless, throughout the meal she felt vaguely uneasy, though she tried to hide it, and kept up a fire of witty remarks. And her other self, too, smiled at her across the table and talked easily.

They compared themselves in detail, and found they were completely identical in every way, even to the tiny mole on their left forearm. Their tastes, too, agreed. They took the same amount of sugar in their tea, and liked and disliked the same foodstuffs.

"I've got my eye on that pink iced cake," laughed Doll. "Have you?"

Joan admitted it. So they shared it.

"You'll never have any trouble over buying each other birthday or Christmas presents," commented Will. "How nice to know exactly what the other wants!"

Bill had a permanent grin on his face, and beamed all over the table all the time. For once he did not have a great deal to say. He seemed too happy for words, and kept losing the thread of the conversation to gaze upon Doll fondly.

"We're going to be married tomorrow!" he announced unexpectedly, and they protested their surprise at the lack of warning. But they promised to be there.

There followed an evening of various sorts of games, and the similar thought-processes of Joan and Doll led to much amusement, especially in the guessing games. And twice they played checkers and twice they drew.

It was a merry evening, and Bill was merriest of all. Yet when they came to say goodnight, Joan felt the return of the old uneasiness. As they left in the car, Joan caught a glimpse of Doll's face as she stood beside Bill at the gate. And she divined that under that air of gayety, Doll suffered the same uneasiness as she.

Doll and Bill were married in a distant registry office next day, using a fictitious name and birthplace for Doll to avoid any publicity—after all, no one would question her identity.

CHAPTER V

Complications and Tragedy

WINTER came and went. Doll and Bill seemed to have

* Joan discovered what many film-stars discover when first seeing and hearing themselves on the screen: that one's own self appears almost as a stranger at the first detached view.—Author.

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settled down quite happily, and the quartette remained as close friends as ever. Both Doll and Joan were smitten with the urge to take up flying as a hobby, and joined the local flying club. They each bought a single-seater, and went for long flights, cruising side by side.

Almost in self-protection from this neglect (they had no interest in flying) Bill and Will began to work again together, delving further into the mysteries of the atom. This time they were searching for the yet-to-be-discovered secret of tapping the potential energy which the atom held.

And almost at once they stumbled on a new lead.

Formerly they had been able to divert atomic energy without being able to transform it into useful power. It was as if they had constructed a number of artificial dams at various points in a turbulent river, which altered the course of the river without tapping any of its force—though that is a poor and misleading analogy.

But now they had conceived, and were building, an amazingly complex machine which, in the same unsatisfactory analogy, could be likened to a turbine-generator, tapping some of the power of that turbulent river.

The "river," however, was very turbulent indeed, and needed skill and courage to harness. And there was a danger of the harness suddenly slipping.

PRESENTLY, the others became aware that Doll's health was gradually failing. She tried hard to keep up her usual air of brightness and cheerfulness, but she could not sleep, and became restless and nervous.

And Joan, who was her almost constant companion, suddenly realized what was worrying that mind which was so similar to hers. The realization was a genuine shock, which left her trembling, but she faced it.

"I think it would be a good thing for Doll and Bill to come and live here for a while, until Doll's better," she said rather diffidently to Will one day.

"Yes, okay, if you think you can persuade them," replied Will. He looked a little puzzled.

"We have far too many empty rooms here," she said defensively. "Anyway, I can help Doll if I'm with her more."

Doll seemed quite eager to come, though a little dubious, but Bill thought it a great idea. They moved within the week.

At first, things did improve. Doll began to recover, and became more like her natural self. She was much less highly strung, and joined in the evening games with the other three with gusto. She studied Will's favorite game, backgammon, and began to enjoy beating him thoroughly and regularly.

And then Joan began to fail.

She became nerveless, melancholy, and even morose. It seemed as though through helping Doll back to health, she had been infected with the same complaint.

Will was worried, and insisted on her being examined by a doctor.

The doctor told Will in private: "There's nothing physically wrong. She's nursing some secret worry, and she'll get worse until this worry is eased. Persuade her to tell you what it is—she refuses to tell me."

She also refused to tell Will, despite his pleadings.

And now Doll, who knew what the secret was, began to worry about Joan, and presently she relapsed into her previous nervous condition.

So it continued for a week, a miserable week for the two harassed and

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perplexed husbands, who did not know which way to turn. The following week, however, both women seemed to make an effort, and brightened up somewhat, and could even laugh at times.

The recovery continued, and Bill and Will deemed it safe to return to their daily work in the lab, completing the atom-harnessing machine.

ONE day Will happened to return to the house unexpectedly, and found the two women in each other's arms on a couch, crying their eyes out. He stood staring for a moment. They suddenly became aware of him, and parted, drying their eyes.

"What's up, Will? Why have you come back?" asked Joan, unsteadily, sniffing.

"Er—to get my slide-rule: I'd forgotten it," he said. "Bill wanted to trust his memory, but I think there's something wrong with his figures. I want to check up before we test the machine further. But—what's the matter with you two?"

"Oh, we're all right," said Doll, strainedly and not very convincingly. She blew her nose, and endeavored to pull herself together. But almost immediately she was overtaken by another burst of weeping, and Joan put her arms around her comfortingly.

"Look here," said Will, in sudden and unusual exasperation, "I've had about enough of this. You know that Bill and I are only too willing to deal with whatever you're worrying about. Yet the pair of you won't say a word—only cry and fret. How can we help if you won't tell us? Do you think we like to see you going on like this?"

"I'll tell you, Will," said Joan, quietly.

Doll emitted a muffled "No!" but Joan ignored her, and went on: "Don't you see that Bill has created another me in *every* detail? Every memory and every feeling? And because Doll thinks and feels exactly as I do, she's in love with you! She has been that way from the very beginning. All this time she's been trying to conquer it, to suppress it, and make Bill happy instead."

Doll's shoulders shook with the intensity of her sobbing. Will laid his hands gently on them, consolingly. He could think of nothing whatever to say. He had not even dreamt of such a situation, obvious as it appeared now.

"Do you wonder the conflict got her down?" said Joan. "Poor girl! I brought her here to be nearer to you, and that eased things for her."

"But it didn't for you," said Will, quietly, looking straight at her. "I see now why you began to worry. Why didn't you tell me then, Joan?"

"How could I?"

He bit his lip, paced nervously over to the window, and stood with his back to the pair on the couch.

"What a position!" he thought. "What can we do? Poor Bill!"

He wondered how he could break the sorry news to his best friend, and even as he wondered, the problem was solved for him.

From the window there was a view down the length of the wide, shallow valley, and a couple of miles away the white concrete laboratory could just be seen nestling at the foot of one of the farther slopes. There were fields all around it, and a long row of great sturdy oak trees started from its northern corner.

From this height and distance the whole place looked like a table-top model. Will stared moodily at that little white box where Bill was, and tried to clarify his chaotic thoughts.

And suddenly, incredibly, before his eyes the distant white box spurted up in a dusty cloud of chalk-powder, and

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ere a particle of it had neared its topmost height, the whole of that part of the valley was split across by a curtain of searing, glaring flame. The whole string of oak trees, tough and amazingly deep-rooted though they were, floated up through the air like feathers of wind-blown thistledown before the blast of that mighty eruption.

The glaring flame vanished suddenly, like a light that had been turned out, and left a thick, brown, heaving fog in its place, a cloud of earth that had been pulverized. Will caught a glimpse of the torn oak trees falling back into this brown, rolling cloud, and then the blast wave, which had traveled up the valley, smote the house.

The window was instantly shattered and blown in, and he went flying backwards in a shower of glass fragments. He hit the floor awkwardly, and sprawled there, and only then did his laggard brain realize what had happened.

Bill's habitual impatience had at last been his undoing. He had refused to wait any longer for Will's return, and gone on with the test, trusting to his memory. And he had been wrong.

The harness had slipped.

CHAPTER VI

Which One?

A MAN sat on a hill with a wide and lovely view of the country, bright in summer sunshine, spread before him. The rich green squares of the fields, the white ribbons of the lanes, the yellow blocks of haystacks and gray spires of village churches, made up a pattern infinitely pleasing to the eye.

And the bees hummed drowsily, nearby sheep and cattle made the noises of their kind, and a neighboring thicket fairly rang with the unending chorus of a hundred birds.

But all this might as well been set on another planet, for the man could neither see nor hear the happy environment. He was in hell.

It was a fortnight now since Bill had gone. When that grief had began to wear off, it was succeeded by the most perplexing and unique problem that had ever beset a member of the human race.

Will had been left to live with two women who loved him equally violently. Neither could ever conquer or suppress that love, whatever they did. They knew that.

On the other hand, Will was a person who was only capable of loving one of the women. Monogamy is deep-rooted in most normal people, and particularly so with Will. He had looked forward to traveling through life with one constant companion, and only one —Joan.

But now there were two Joans, identical in appearance, feeling, thought. Nevertheless, they were two separate people. And between them he was a torn and anguished man, with his domestic life in shapeless ruins.

He could not ease his mental torture with work, for since Bill died so tragically, he could not settle down to anything in a laboratory.

It was no easier for Joan and Doll. Probably harder. To have one's own self as a rival—even a friendly, understanding rival—for a man's companionship and affection was almost unbearable.

This afternoon they had both gone to a flying club, to attempt to escape for awhile the burden of worry, apparently. Though neither was in a fit condition to fly, for they were tottering on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

The club was near the hill where Will was sitting and striving to find some working solution to a unique human problem which seemed quite insoluble.

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So it was no coincidence that presently a humming in the sky caused him to lift dull eyes to see both the familiar monoplanes circling and curving across the blue spaces between the creamy, cumulus clouds.

He lay back on the grass watching them. He wondered which plane was which, but there was no means of telling, for they were similar models. And anyway, that would not tell him which was Joan and which was Doll, for they quite often used each other's planes, to keep the "feel" of both. He wondered what they were thinking up there. . . .

ONE of the planes straightened and flew away to the west, climbing as it went. Its rising drone became fainter. The other plane continued to bank and curve above.

Presently, Will closed his eyes and tried to doze in the warm sunlight. It was no use. In the darkness of his mind revolved the same old maddening images, doubts, and questions. It was as if he had become entangled in a nightmare from which he could not awake.

The engine of the plane overhead suddenly stopped. He opened his eyes, but could not locate it for a moment.

Then he saw it against the sun, and it was falling swiftly in a tailspin. It fell out of the direct glare of the sun, and he saw it in detail, revolving as it plunged so that the wings glinted like a flashing heliograph. He realized with a shock that it was but a few hundred feet from the ground.

He scrambled to his feet, in an awful agitation.

"Joan!" he cried, hoarsely. "Joan!"

The machine continued its fall steadily and inevitably, spun down past his eye-level, and fell into the center of one of the green squares of the fields below.

He started running down the hill even as it landed. As the sound of the crash reached him, he saw a rose of fire blossom like magic in that green square, and from it a wavering growth of black, oily smoke mounted into the heavens. The tears started from his eyes, and ran freely.

When he reached the scene, the inferno was past its worst, and as the flames died he saw that nothing was left, only black, shapeless, scattered things, unrecognizable as once human or once machine.

There was a squeal of brakes from the road. An ambulance had arrived from the flying club. Two men jumped out, burst through the hedge. It did not take them more than a few seconds to realize that there was no hope.

"Quick, Mr. Fredricks, jump in," cried one of them, recognizing Will. "We must go straight to the other one."

The other one!

Before he could question them, Will was hustled between them into the driving cabin of the ambulance. The vehicle was quickly reversed, and sped off in the opposite direction.

"Did—did the other plane—" began Will, and the words stuck in his throat.

The driver, with his eye on the road which was scudding under their wheels at sixty miles an hour, nodded grimly.

"Didn't you see, sir? They both crashed at exactly the same time, in the same way—tailspin. A shocking accident—terrible. I can't think how to express my sympathy, sir. I only pray that this one won't turn out so bad."

IT was as if the ability to feel had left Will. His thoughts slowed up almost to a standstill. He sat there numbed. He dare not try to think.

But, sluggishly, his thoughts went on. Joan and Doll had crashed at exactly the same time in exactly the same way. That was above coincidence. They must have both been thinking along the same

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lines again, and that meant they had crashed *deliberately!*

He saw now the whole irony of it, and groaned.

Joan and Doll had each tried to solve the problem in their own way, and each had reached the same conclusion without being aware what the other was thinking. They saw that one of them would have to step out of the picture if Will was ever to be happy. They knew that that one would have to step completely out, for life could no longer be tolerated by her if she had to lose Will.

And, characteristically, they had each made up their minds to be the self-sacrificing one.

Doll felt that she was an intruder, wrecking the lives of a happily married pair. It was no fault of hers: she had not asked to be created full of love for a man she could never have.

But she felt that she was leading an unnecessary existence, and every moment of it was hurting the man she loved. So she decided to relinquish the gift of life.

Joan's reasoning was that she had been partly responsible for bringing Doll into this world, unasked, and with exactly similar feelings and longings as herself. Ever since she had existed, those feelings had been ungratified, cruelly crushed and thwarted. It wasn't fair. Doll had as much right to happiness as she. Joan had enjoyed her period of happiness with Will. Now let Doll enjoy hers.

So it was that two planes, a mile apart, went spinning into crashes that were meant to appear accidental—and did, except to one man, the one who most of all was intended never to know the truth.

The driver was speaking again.

"It was a ghastly dilemma for us at the club. We saw 'em come down on opposite sides and both catch fire. We have only one fire engine, one ambulance. Had to send the engine to one, and rush this ambulance to the other. The engine couldn't have done any good at this end, as it happens. Hope it was in time where we're going!"

Will's dulled mind seemed to take this in quite detachedly. Who had been killed in the crash he saw? Joan or Doll? Joan or Doll?

Then suddenly it burst upon him that it was only the original Joan that he loved. That was the person whom he had known so long, around whom his affection had centered. The hair he had caressed, the lips he had pressed, the gay brown eyes which had smiled into his. He had never touched Doll in that way.

Doll seemed but a shadow of all that. She may have had memories of those happenings, but she had never actually experienced them. They were only artificial memories. Yet they must have seemed real enough to her.

The ambulance arrived at the scene of the second crash.

The plane had flattened out a few feet from the ground, and not landed so disastrously as the other. It lay crumpled athwart a burned and blackened hedge. The fire engine had quenched the flames within a few minutes. And the pilot had been dragged clear, unconscious, badly knocked about and burned.

They got her into the ambulance, and rushed her to a hospital.

CHAPTER VII

Identity

WILL had been sitting by the bedside for three hours before the girl in the bed had opened her eyes.

Blank, brown eyes were, which looked at him, then at the hospital ward,

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without the faintest change of expression.

"Joan!" he whispered, clasping her free arm—the other was in a splint. There was no response of any sort. She lay back gazing unseeingly as the ceiling. He licked his dry lips. It couldn't be Joan after all.

"Doll!" he tried. "Do you feel all right?"

Still no response.

"I know that expression," said the doctor, who was standing by. "She's lost her memory."

"For good, do you think?" asked Will, perturbed.

The doctor pursed his lips to indicate he didn't know.

"Good Lord! Is there no way of finding out whether she is my wife or my sister-in-law?"*

"If you don't know, no one does, Mr. Fredericks," replied the doctor. "We can't tell which plane who was in. We can't tell anything from her clothes, for they were burned in the crash, and destroyed before we realized their importance. We've often remarked their uncanny resemblance. Certainly you can tell them apart."

"I can't!" answered Will, in anguish. "There is no way."

THE next day, the patient had largely recovered her senses, and was able to sit up and talk. But a whole tract of her memory had been obliterated. She remembered nothing of her twin, and in fact nothing at all of the events after the duplication experiment.

Lying on the couch in the laboratory, preparing herself under the direction of Bill, was the last scene she remembered.

The hospital psychologist said that the shock of the crash had caused her to unconsciously repress a part of her life which she did not want to remember. She could not remember now if she wanted to. He said he might discover the truth from her eventually, but if he did, it would take months—maybe even years.

But naturally her memories of Will, and their marriage, were intact, and she loved him as strongly as ever.

Was she Joan or Doll?

Will spent a sleepless night, turning the matter over. Did it really matter? There was only one left now—why not assume she was Joan, and carry on? But he knew that as long as doubt and uncertainty existed, he would never be able to recover the old free life he had had with Joan.

It seemed that he would have to surrender her to the psychologist, and that would bring to light all sorts of details which neither he, Joan, nor Bill had ever wished to be revealed.

But the next day something turned up which changed the face of things.

While he was sitting at the bedside, conversing with the girl who might or might not be Joan, a nurse told him a man was waiting outside to see him. He went, and found a police officer standing there.

Ever since the catastrophe which had wrecked Bill's laboratory, the police had been looking around that locality, searching for any possible clues.

Buried in the ground they had found a safe, burst and broken. Inside were the charred remains of books, papers, and letters. They had examined them, without gleaning much, and now the officer wished to know if Will could gather anything from them.

Will took the bundle and went through it. There was a packet of purely personal letters, and some old tradesmen's accounts, paid and receipted. These, with the officer's con-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 109

* Doll had been accepted locally as Joan's twin sister.—Author.

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GIANTS OUT OF THE SUN

By PETER HORN

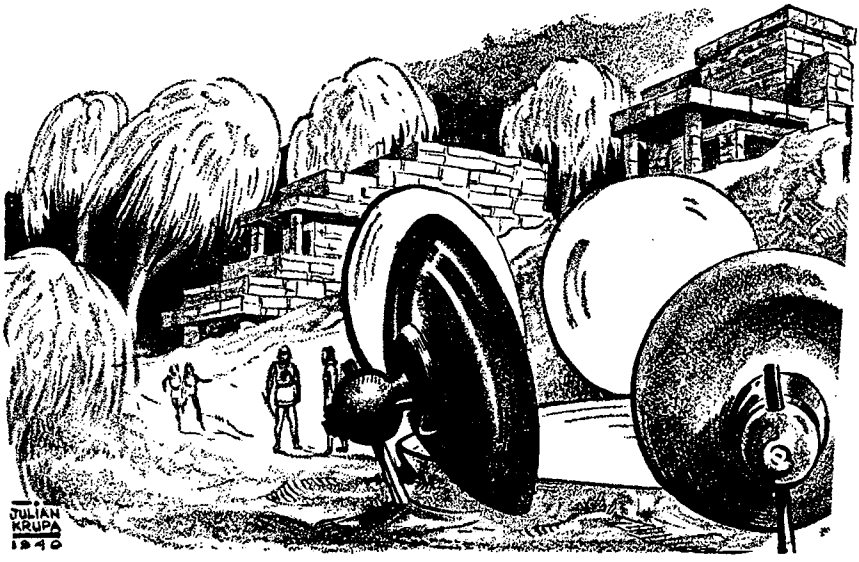
"THEY die like flies," he said to me. "*Senor*, we do not know what is 'appening. But in the 'ospital here in Huayopata the newborn children, they die like the flies. For three weeks, not a single new baby lasts more than an hour. Why? No one knows. Dr. Dean, he thought he knew, and what 'appened? He went away before he told anyone what he knew."

"Well, Dr. Alfarez," I said, "I still don't know what it's all about. Ed Dean worked beside me for three years. If he said he knew something, rest assured that he did."

The dark little doctor shrugged. "Like flies," he said, in his melancholy way. He picked up the loosely held together notebook. "Here is the book he 'ad in the 'ospital desk, *Senor* Thompson. Per'aps it will 'elp you."

It didn't help at all, except to confuse me—yes, and it did more than that—it frightened me. The book was full of scattered little observations of all sorts, along with the documentation of his experiments. Here was a fragment of a formula, there an isolated line: ". . . Might be a deficiency of D vitamin to hyper state . . . nonsense of course but babies appear to be *burned* internally . . . might investigate effects on dogs,

What grim terror lay in Peru and what did Edward Dean have to do with the giants?



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cats, etc. . . ." Or the short paragraph that was unfinished: "Dr. Alfarez has no inkling of the relationship between the deaths and the geographical distribution—"

Of course, Alfarez had read the notes, but they had not helped him. What had he made of the further note which said something about: "It seems to be moving in an almost perfect circle. If this is true, then the consequences may be more terrible than any living man can foresee." That was what frightened me originally. I had worked beside Dean, and knowing him, I could not imagine what circumstances could possibly have made him write a sentence like that. He was a cool, sane scientist, and his work in various fields of research medicine had given him a brilliant reputation.

Yet he had written that ominous phrase; it was in his neat, precise writing. As far as I knew, the evidence was all around me. A little town called Huayopata in the center of Peru had found the infant mortality rate increasing at a terrifying rate. When Dean went down to investigate it for the Rockefeller Foundation, he plunged into work so completely that in three months he had no time to file reports, and he had dropped me a noncommittal card. Then suddenly we received word from Alfarez, the head of the local hospital, that Dean had disappeared and did we know anything about it.

We didn't. And when another month went by with no word from Dean, and increasingly alarming letters from Alfarez, I was sent down to do a double job; help Alfarez and help the consulate in Lima. They were looking everywhere for Dean.

I went first to Lima. The score of clerks, busy with the various fiestas

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IMPORTANT:

The history of this manuscript, presented here as fiction, is one which will undoubtedly interest the reader. Some two months ago, a friend of one of the editors wrote him about a man he had met in New York, through a common acquaintance. This man, referred to as Mr. X, since, for good reason he has insisted that his anonymity be preserved, had in a short period earned a queer reputation, and his general behavior alarmed those who knew him.

Some months before he had gone to South America to hunt for a colleague who had disappeared somewhere in Peru. He returned without the man he had gone to seek, but he told one of the strangest stories this friend of our editor had ever heard, and he immediately wrote us, suggesting that we might be interested in it.

Here new complications arose. Mr. X had told his story so often, and with such thoroughly bad results, that he had resolved not to mention it again. He knew that even intimate friends of his believed that he was no longer quite sane, and that they ascribed this to the harrowing experiences he had suffered in the South American wilds. His despondency and resignation were amply illustrated when he let two urgent letters from our offices go unanswered. Finally, we wrote to Peter Horn, one of our writers who lives in New York. To make a long story short, he went to see Mr. X, and after much diplomatic maneuvering, succeeded in getting the story.

We are presenting that story here. All names used are fictitious, of course. It is presented in fiction form because this is essentially a magazine of entertainment. The editors are curious, however, to see how the reader will react to the various facts mentioned by Mr. X, almost all of which can easily be verified. Some of the news clippings to which he refers, for instance, bear him out to lengths which must prove thought-provoking. Or, perhaps they merely coincide with his story to a really astonishing extent. The editors of this publication are sincerely interested in hearing from anyone who may have either contradictory or substantiating facts. The day may come when Mr. X may be asked to drop his anonymity, and tell his story publicly, because of new and terrifying developments—but that we leave for you to decide.

—THE EDITORS.

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and siestas, gave it up. Maybe, they said, he had fallen in love with a half-breed and run off to Brazil with her. Maybe a snake bit him and he fell into the river. I went to Huayopata. This was October, and the South American summer was like a scorching blanket laid over the land. All around me, unknown to the world at large, or even to other cities in Peru, death walked unhampered. I knew I was a child at the game three days after I went to work. And after reading what Dean had said, I knew the best answer to the strange plague was—find Dr. Edward Dean.

TWO days after I had gone through Dean's notebooks — a mother had committed suicide that day in the hospital when her baby, born of a Caesarean, died immediately afterward—a note came from Lima. The consulate officials had contacted someone in Cuzco who said that a man answering Dean's description had stayed overnight at a hotel there, and had gone out early the next morning, dressed in clothes that suggested a trip into the interior. There had been two native pack-carriers with him. The natives had not been seen since, and it was supposed that they were still with this man who looked like Dean; thin, hawk-faced, and very tall—not a difficult man to remember.

But there was a map too, something that had been found in a drawer in the desk of the room where Dean had stayed—for I knew it was Dean the moment I laid eyes on it. There was his own handwriting scrawled in several places. It was a map of the country surrounding Huayopata. Dean had marked two places *HERE* with maltese crosses and put question marks after them. Radiating from both these places were conflicting lines, like waves, and the ends of the lines were curled, in the manner of an engineer signifying a wavelength.

And here there were more notes, one about a light ray unfinished, on the map. But there were other conjectures about plant life, about spore formations, about disease germs on the rivers —and after each little town in the vicinity was a record of the number of . . . of what?

Dr. Edward Dean's Map

When I asked Dr. Alfarez about it, he said he knew nothing. It seemed obvious that Dean had tried to tie up the infant mortalities in the surrounding towns with Huayopata, but if so he had not told Alfarez about it. And who was Herbert Gottlieb?

Only one thing was certain. Ed Dean, for reasons he had kept to himself, had gone into the Peruvian wilderness looking for something that he

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felt too dangerous to talk about. And whoever wanted to find Dean would have to go after him. The map said, *START HERE,* pointing to Cuzco. That was where I would start. I was going to follow Dean into the interior.

Before I left, I sealed Dean's notes and his map, together with the circumstances under which I had gotten them. I left instructions to forward them to my superior officer at the Foundation if I did not return within three months.

I went to Cuzco, listened to a lot of advice from the consular office there, and hired a young half-caste Peruvian Indian boy to tote my baggage. And then I started. Where? In the general direction of the maltese crosses, heading for the first one. There was no road, no path, no markings, nothing. But I had to find Dean. I had to know not only what had become of him, but what was going to become of those babies dying in a little town in Peru . . . and the "consequences more terrible than any man could foresee . . ."

WE were three days out when the young lad with me, named Palo, wanted to turn back. " I have fear for these places, *Senor,*" he said. "I come from these mountains, only more so north. My people run away many years ago. Great devils live here." This first sign of his fear ended in my doubling his pay. I was sure then that he had only played me for the money.

Four days later, he balked again. It took me hours to get him to go on. The mountains were wild and desolate. For more than an entire day, the day before, we had made our way through a totally dead forest. There had not been the slightest sign of any life there. Not even a weed, a blade of grass, a leaf. It was as if the hand of death had paused there. Even money would not budge Palo, but the advice from the consulate did. I took out my gun and threatened to shoot him on the spot if he did not at once resume.

We went on another day. With each step the earth seemed more bare. The cloudless sky was alive with heat, but in an area where the land should have teemed with tropical life, there was silence. There were no birds, and after the days of trekking through forests filled with wild music, the quiet seemed full of foreboding.

Then ahead, the land seemed to end. In a few minutes I saw what it was. We were approaching the edge of a gorge, and we would have to circle on its rim. As nearly as I could tell, we were but three days from the probable location of the first maltese cross.

In the glare of the sun on the dark earth I made out a white object lying several hundred feet ahead. I was halfway to it when I broke into a run. When I reached it I could hardly pick it up, for my hands were trembling. It was a white pith helmet, the kind I was wearing.

I bent over and lifted it. Inside were the initials: *E.D.*

I had come long, torturous miles to find that helmet.

When Palo came up and saw what I held, he unstrapped the bags and stood there before me. He kept his large brown eyes on the ground, and in the tropical warmth, he shivered in his rags. *"No voy, Senor,"* he said. He wouldn't go on.

I walked farther, to the edge of the precipice. The gorge sloped steeply away, parting farther on to form a huge valley that seemed circular in shape. Ten feet from the top of the valley, and filling it, were great misty clouds. It looked like an immense bowl filled with a milky, swirling mist.

Suddenly I started and moved back an involuntary step. For a moment I

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had fancied seeing something move in that mist—something huge and glassy, with . . . and then I laughed. I laughed partly to reassure Palo, because he had come up the moment before, and partly to reassure myself. The clouds had taken a form too fantastic to express in words.

"Well, Palo, are you coming?" I said.

"*No voy, Senor, por Dios*—don' go!"

I shrugged my shoulders. There was but one way now, for the fear in his eyes was greater than he had shown for my gun. I would have to play on that fear. "Goodbye, Palo," I said, going back for the packs.

He watched me go to the very edge of the plateau, where some thirty feet below, there was a sort of cut-out path in the rock. I swung over the ledge and started down the descent, then looked back. Palo called out, incredulously, "You go alone? You leave Palo?" I said nothing and continued climbing down to the path.

When I had gone some twenty feet, I glanced back. Palo was setting foot within the gorge, following me gingerly. Still I kept climbing down, though slowly, waiting for the boy to catch me.

Then, all at once, I heard Palo scream, his voice like a single, high-pitched string quivering in the stillness. I looked up to see him tottering on a ledge, but both his hands were stretched out before him as if he were warding off something—

And turning, I saw it too. I will never forget that one terror-filled moment. It was as if I had ceased living then, for I stood like a stone, seeing that monstrous apparition take shape as it came up out of the mist. Little by little it emerged—first, a huge hemisphere of glass under which I could see several men clad in the costumes of the ancient Incas. The glass rose higher from the swirling whiteness. It was the top part of the skull of a man of truly gigantic proportions. His nose alone must have been five feet high. The top of his skull was missing, and the glass took its place.

Now the eyes turned toward me. Great, bloodshot, hollow eyes, dark as night, their pupils as large as a man's head, they came closer. The cruel lips, with fanged teeth protruding, moved slightly. The whole head had emerged, a horrible, great, discolored blue head. I could see the men inside the glass skull plainly now, moving among a mass of red wheels and machinery, touching levers, evidently guiding the monster.

From out of the clouds a huge hand swept up past me. In an instant it had come back, and it was holding Palo. The great fingers curled and lifted me gently, laid me in the palm of a hand, and held me there.

In the minute that the whole episode had taken, I had not moved, nor had the thought of defending myself, or using my gun, even occurred to me. The giant was moving now, walking. Dimly I realized that from the rocking motion.

CHAPTER II

The Unknown City

I THINK I must have lost my mind temporarily. I remember the wild thoughts that surged through my brain; suddenly I was insanely frightened and all I could think of was killing before I was killed. I rolled over on my side and drew the heavy automatic I carried, and lying on my back, I pointed the gun at where I imagined the giant's head to be. Already I could feel him crashing to earth, and I was preparing to fling myself clear.

I was waiting for the dense, steamy mist to clear a little, to make the first

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shot count. It was impossible to see inches away; even Palo was invisible. It was during that wait that reason returned, that the first coherent question posed itself to me. What could all this possibly be? I could hardly deal with concepts of such enormity, of such unbelievable creatures. Then I felt something warm and sticky wet around me.

The next moment the great hand was lifting us up over the mist, and there were the horrible eyes looking at us. Now I could make out the men in the glass skull more plainly. They wore silken garments of bright colors, and their faces were grim and intense, pointing to us. I looked to Palo and saw what was happening. He had taken the long knife he carried and had half cut away one of the giant's fingers! I realized then what the sticky liquid was—the giant's blood!

Now, terrified at discovery, the youth cried out. I waited for the fingers to crush us both to quick death. Instead, the giant's other hand came up through the clouds. The great fingers hesitated over my head, then came down and touched my hand. The automatic—I was still holding it, and though the giant wanted it, his fingers were too large for him to be able to take it without hurting me. The men in the skull were regarding me intently. I nodded my head and laid the gun in the giant's hand. Then I took Palo's knife and gave that away too.

The hand turned over and the weapons dropped out. Then the injured hand, moving like a great steam shovel, deposited us gently in the other hand, and the giant resumed walking as he lowered us again.

Two things stood out in my amazement, oddly enough. First, the gentle treatment that we had received, even though Palo had severely wounded the giant. Second, the strange fact that the giant had not realized what was happening to him until his finger was almost gone. And there had been no cry of pain. Could the giant utter any sound? Had it been necessary for the men in that great glass skull to discover the wound?

Palo was crying. I could hear his sobbing over a subdued crashing sound that must have been the giant walking. I wanted to say something to comfort him, but I didn't have the words. I think it would have been a relief to me to be able to cry then too, but I couldn't. I was too frightened, too wonderstruck. I still had not really comprehended all I was seeing and all that was happening; it was too enormous for that. Moment after moment I was coping with the events slowly, trying to understand. . . .

The sun came through with sudden brilliance, and the mist had disappeared. I looked through the fingers that held me. We had entered a city of strange design, a city which from my height seemed to cover some four or five square miles. But it looked like a toy model, for the trees that marked its boundaries were easily five hundred feet tall. There were people below, men and women and children, in avenues to one side of the broad lane on which the giant who held us was walking, and they looked very much like those in the skull.

The buildings were all of exotic architecture, not unlike those unearthed by archaeologists in Central America, huge, monolithic stone structures, with animals and birds carven on them. Walking through this city toward the center, the giant seemed like an automaton. His steps were cautious and measured.

With this latest development a new calm settled over me. Too much excitement had had its effect; my brain could

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absorb no more. I had been shocked too many times within a few minutes and I could react no longer. In this calm, I estimated that the giant was somewhat over a hundred feet tall—and he was heading directly toward two other giants who had appeared and seemed to be waiting for him.

THE other giants were shorter, but otherwise they were like the one which held Palo and me. They wore great golden tunics, with an emblem like the sun emblazoned on their breast. The muscles that played beneath their blue skin were heavy as steel cables, and now I saw how they responded to the touches of the men in the glass skulls, as if they were machines. But they were alive. I knew that, for I had heard the giant's heart beating like a nearby drum when he had lifted us to his eyes.

Now, for the first time, the people below noticed that the giant was holding us. They gathered in idle groups and pointed, looking up. The giant was holding his injured hand in his mouth, sucking his injured finger, while the honey-colored blood ran down his lips.

Suddenly he began rolling his head, and a loud moan like the distant rumble of thunder came from his lips. His body began to sway from side to side. He took the finger from his mouth, looked at it, and again he moaned. Below us I saw the people who had been standing by moving quickly away.

An instant later they were running in a near panic, for the giant, moaning louder now, was stamping his feet—and all at once he broke into an uneven lope. He was clutching me closely now, and the world was rocking crazily. In quick alarm, I looked up to the skull. The men there were moving swiftly, and my own fright was mirrored in their expressions. The giant was running wild!

The earth was echoing the sound of huge feet beating their tattoos, but there was more than one giant running—the other two were after him! The screams and shouts rose up like a blanket of sound from below. Miraculously the giant stepped over buildings, reached another wide path and began running faster. The center of the city was looming now, and as the hand that held me swung, I made out a vast area of brilliant light, seemed to see a small, perfectly circular lake that shone like molten gold. But these were fleeting pictures. I swung as if on a pendulum . . . great tubes, cylinders, trees . . . there were other giants coming swiftly toward us. . . .

They had caught him! The giants behind had reached out and seized the wild one by his arms. His hands had abruptly stopped their swinging, and the jar almost shook me to bits. With a deafening roar, the crazed giant wheeled, tearing his arms loose and raising them over his head as if to bring them down in a blow. The smaller of the other giants swiftly seized the arm that held us, while the other drew close and hugged his chest. The small giant seemed to be trying to reach the wild one's head.

The veins on the wild giant's arms stood out as slowly . . . so slowly . . . he broke the grip on him. Then, swinging his arm back—I knew what he was doing — preparing to hurl us . . . away!

At the top of his swing, another hand caught him. The giants from the rear had come up. Suddenly, for some inexplicable reason, the giant lost all fight. I felt his grip relax—too much—we were rolling off—falling! I remember spinning over in air, falling down an expanse of orange, Palo's shriek like a knife cutting through the sounds of the melee.

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A cloud swept through the air, enveloping me, crushing me, then relaxing as it shot upward again. I had been caught by another giant!

But I had seen Palo hit the ground, seen him clearly as I fell, seemingly hanging in mid-air. And I had seen one of the giant's feet step on him and crush him to an instantaneous, horrible death. . . .

The nightmarish scene slowly righted itself. The wild giant seemed subdued, the others milling around him. The eyes of every one of the men in the glass skulls were on him, but the strong, dark men within the wild giant's skull were moving about calmly, surely. The giant turned away, and his great legs carried him off in prodigious steps.

The monster who had caught me was relatively small, perhaps sixty feet tall, but he was less the automaton the other had been. Now he held me up to his eye level and grinned grotesquely, as if he understood what had happened.

The men in his skull were moving a little machine in the front of the glass enclosed dome, watching me as they spun around something that looked like the eyepiece of a telescope. Suddenly, from the eyepiece, a weird coppery light flashed directly into my eyes.

It was as if an overwhelming fatigue had suddenly descended on me. In the midst of an experience so strange and terrible and incomprehensible that few connected thoughts had come to me since the nightmare had started—I yawned! I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. Vaguely, I was thinking I had been hypnotized . . . that the copper light had done something. . . .

WHEN I awoke I was in a small windowless hut, but light was streaming in through an open doorway. For several moments I lay there, absolutely still, while recollection flooded my mind. What was this strange, unknown world? What had happened to Dean? The helmet had been lying on the brink of the gorge. Did that signify that Dean had been taken by the same—but Dean had suspected something—he had come searching for something. . . . Could it possibly have been that he had known of the existence of these people?

Bewildered, wondering what had happened to me, uncertain where I was, I rose and made for the door which seemed unguarded—and almost killed myself! The earth was a hundred feet below me! I barely clutched the framework and staggered back, shaken to the marrow. Lying on the floor, I stuck my head out and looked below. Then I saw what kept the hut elevated. It was perched on top of a branchless tree, like a birdhouse on a pole. A more effective prison couldn't have been devised. The tree evidently met the middle of the hut floor underneath, and there was no way of getting to it, even if I had dared to contemplate climbing down from that height.

The tree and the hut were situated, as well as I could make out, in the midst of a bare strip of ground. Overhead the sun blazed, and that meant it was near noon—which could only mean that I had been unconscious or asleep since the day before, for it had been late afternoon when poor Palo and I had stopped at the misty gorge. But there was no mist now. There was nothing. Acre after acre of barren earth stretched away, to end with a line of the unbelievably enormous trees. From somewhere the hum and faint stridence of human voices floated up to me like the muffled sounds in a dream.

Another sound came, a scraping that seemed to come from behind the hut, where I could not see it. Looking down I saw something astonishing happen. From out of the bare earth something

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had grown—grown in the few moments since I had last looked down—and it was still growing even as I looked at it. It was a sapling, pushing its way up at an appalling speed!

Suddenly a huge hand snaked out and seized it. In a moment it had been uprooted, and the whole body of a giant came into view. As he stood up, I saw that in his hands he held the uprooted trunks of a score of trees. The next moment there was a coppery light flashing at me from the glass skull. I blinked and stared at the golden-skinned men there, and the coppery gleam became more intense.

I was standing at the doorway then, and instinctively I wanted to get away from that light. It made me feel dizzy, sleepy, tired, but at the same time I wanted to fight it. I kept staring back at it until I was unsteady on my feet. In a moment I would fall . . . then the giant had turned and another had come up. The next moment an enormous hand was coming down toward me. I ducked back inside the hut and the hand blotted out all light.

But when the hand moved away a moment later—there before me stood Dr. Edward Dean.

CHAPTER III

Conquerors from the Past

HE advanced to my side and took my hand. There was a month old beard on his face, and he wore white linens, a little faded by the sun. His face was screwed up in a quizzical, tight-lipped smile that was inexpressibly sad. "Hello, Thompson," he said, quietly. "I felt it would be you who'd come."

I rubbed a half numb hand across my face. "You're alive then," I whispered, grasping him.

"Partly," said Dean, that same smile on his face.

It was queer, hearing him say that, and seeing the expression on his face when he said it. "Dean," I said, "what is this all about? What does it mean? Where are we?"

Dean almost laughed, but lines of pain covered his face.

I just looked at him then, and he said, quietly, "I'm drugged, you know. Not enough not to realize it, but just the same, I've been slowed down. Part of their technique. Same sort of thing that hit you a couple of seconds ago." He turned to the doorway and waved an arm. The giant who had placed Dean in the hut, extended his hand and Dean stepped onto his palm. I followed him at a sign.

The giant's fingers clasped us lightly and he began walking in a direction opposite to the one which the doorway of my hut had faced. "Dean," I said, "what are you talking about?"

He looked away from me, his face pale and haggard. "I don't know," he muttered. "I'm going crazy."

A strange fear had come to me from the moment I had laid eyes on Ed Dean. I didn't know what it was—the things he said, or the way he said them, or both. All I knew was that I couldn't speak anymore. It was just as well. Dean had fallen silent, his eyes still averted.

After some minutes, the giant walked through a thick curtain of trees whose branches were like a canopy, and there lay the city of these unknown people. I had only had fragmentary glimpses of it before, but now I saw it in some detail. It was magnificently planned and executed. The buildings were massive, constructed from huge blocks of granite, and decorated with carven images. Twice I glimpsed other giants not far away, but below there were

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normal people, people like the dark men inside the glass skulls, except that their clothes were less ornate.

There was something vaguely familiar about them, strange as they were, about their monolithic buildings, something ancient, other-worldly . . . as if somewhere I had seen or read about this land.

The avenues of the city seemed to be circular in one way, and like the spokes of a wheel in the other, and the giant had been proceeding along one of these radial streets, or rather, along one of the great paths that paralleled the streets, for the giant didn't venture near the avenues of the normal-sized people.

The day before, when the giant who had captured me had gone berserk, he had run toward the center of the city. I remembered the glimpsed images of great machines and of a shining yellow lake. Now the center of the city seemed to be near, for the same effect of intensely brilliant light made itself apparent. I wriggled a little in the giant's hand, the better to see.

Then I saw it all: the great cylinders and the tubes and the mirror magnificent beyond belief and the hundreds of machines and—yes, *the giants in the making*. For there it all was in a vast circle in the center of the city, entirely in the open, as it had to be, but there were no people about.

In the center lay what might have been a lake of the purest molten gold. It seemed to have neither surface nor depth; it was as if an infinitesimal piece of the sun itself had dropped to earth to lie there in glory. But it was actually a great mirror, with a surface so perfect that it seemed to merge with the sun it reflected. Surrounding it at several points were huge revolving mechanisms which looked like great searchlights, though they were dark and without any obvious utility. Leading away from the mirror were myriads of tubes, pipes, coils, cylinders—as if somebody had designed a machine to harness the sun.

The giant walked past the mirror and the great cylinders were before me. Here were enormous transparent vessels stretched in a line that must have numbered a score. There were hardly two the same size. Inside each there was a man . . . or what had been a man—for these cylinders seemed to be *creating* giants! From those containing men who were but a few feet over normal in height, they ranged to others where men were fifty feet tall. And the chambers had been able to expand with their occupants.

As the giant walked by the great file of these chambers, I saw the faces of the men within. They were different from the people in the city; they were ordinary Peruvians, Indians mostly. Their faces were expressionless and they stood perfectly rigid in their glass cylinders. And, as their size increased, so had their skins changed to an ever deeper shade of blue.

"DEAN," I said, "what is the meaning of all this?"

"Look ahead," he replied. "Do you see that great dome-shaped building? That's where we're going. That's where you'll find out all you want to know, and more than you've ever wanted to know." He was breathing heavily now, as if through some exertion. Then he whispered, "Be patient, Thompson. I've been drugged for days. I'm trying to recover my senses. There's a lot I have to tell you." He had covered his eyes with his hands as he spoke.

The giant came to the great dome-shaped building, set off from the others by an expanse of white stone, and then he lowered Dean and myself to the ground.

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Immediately a tall man, dressed in a bright red garment like a tunic, came from the building and escorted us in. Dean and he seemed to know each other, but they spoke little as we walked through enormous halls. There were not many people about, but those who were there stopped to look at me in astonishment. What speaking I did hear was all in an elaborately foreign tongue, which was no clue at all. The walls were all heavily decorated with bas-reliefs and murals, depicting what must have been historical scenes, and in many of them the sun appeared to be playing a large part. The entire place seemed to be in excellent taste, furnished for kings, and conceived by minds that were learned.

We came then to a large wooden door studded with golden ingots. Our escort went through, returning in a moment to motion us to follow. Inside was a single chamber. The floor was marble, and the sun lay on it bright ribbons that flowed from numerous and immense windows set in three walls.

At the far end three men sat on short chairs. Behind them a map covered almost an entire wall. As we drew near, I saw that it was made of precious stones, and that it appeared to be a map of the world—or at least, of South and Central America and other lands. But the other places were poorly executed and full of errors. There was really no conception of the size of the world, or of its shape, and the South American sections were abnormally large. A huge ruby glittered at one point, which from its general location, I took to be our present spot.

The three men were not old, yet their eyes seemed almost ancient. They sat easily, their arms on the square arms of their chairs, dressed in loose gowns of a linen shade. Each had the same insignia embroidered there, a bird, half-concealed in a basket. Their faces were dark, and though they differed from each other, they shared in common a regality that I had seldom seen. The one who sat in the center, a pleasant-faced man with an aquiline nose, nodded.

"Welcome once again, Dr. Dean. This is your friend?"

Dean nodded. "This is Dr. Ivar Thompson," he said.

"Welcome to *Tampu-tocco*, The House of Windows, Dr. Thompson. The Inca people consider you their guest."

"*Inca?*" I blurted.

It was as if the ground under my feet had moved. *Inca.* A nation that had been dead for hundreds of years. . . . Was this the explanation for the strange familiarity I had felt, the feeling that I had known—

"Yes, Dr. Thompson, we are Incas. I am Auca, and these are my brothers, Uchu and Cachi. We are the descendants of the original men whose names we bear, and our people are the remnants of the great nation that once ruled here."

"I don't understand," I said. "Why are you hidden away here? What are these giants? What does—"

"I am sure Dr. Dean is anxious to tell you, and I leave what I know is an unpleasant duty to him. Meanwhile, I offer you two alternatives. You may stay here with us and live as a useful member of our society, for we have use for doctors. You will never leave the valley until the conquest is accomplished, and you will be drugged at periodic intervals when we hold our religious ceremonies."

He paused, and I said, "Never leave here? And what does this talk of a conquest mean? Surely you don't intend warring on Peru?"

"Not Peru alone, but the world."

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HIS statement stunned me. I turned to Dean, but he was looking at the floor. "It's insane," I said. "Do you think even these giants can possibly conquer the might of the civilized world? And why should you even want to—"

"Please, Dr. Thompson, I have no desire to discuss the matter with you. I know from Dr. Dean how different our views are. I do not ask you to help us as a combatant, but I must tell you that if you do not agree to live here peaceably, then the alternative is a painless death. I hope you will choose the wiser course."

"But this is—"

"I know it is a shock, Doctor. You can have until tomorrow to decide." With that, he and the two with him nodded, signifying that the audience was finished. The man who had escorted us into the chamber started walking out. Dean tapped my arm and followed, and I went behind him.

Once outside, we were left alone. We went out of the building and into the street. "Dean," I said, "you've got to tell me now. I can't understand this at all."

"Listen," Dean said, "and listen carefully. I told you before that I had been drugged. They do that by shining a light in my eyes, a copper light that seems to paralyze me. Now I'm watched all the time I'm conscious."

"*What's* happening here?" I cried. "I can't understand any of this. What made you come here? Are these people really Incas?"

"Come with me to the center of the city. The answer lies there in what seems to be plain view. But there is a mist, which, viewed from above, obscures everything, while here it is nothing. These people are the descendants of the original Incas, as well as I know. Their plan is diabolical enough to believe anything."

We went to the center of the city. Before the great mirror, Dean stopped and said, "This is called *Paccari-tampu*, the House of the Dawn. Do you know what these cylinders do? You can see only the *results*—which are the raising of these giants. But they are merely an after-effect. They need the giants, true, as a temporary guard. The Incas are taking some vital power in the sun to do it—and they're taking it away from the rest of the world! The Incas have hidden here for hundreds of years, nursing a hatred for the world which destroyed their race, which enslaved them. Their scientists were as great as their architects. For centuries they labored secretly, until they found something in the rays of the sun that means life itself. I can't go into this because I don't know everything yet, but they have isolated that function of sunlight which activates chlorophyl—and which keeps all life going on earth. It isn't merely a question of minor matters like Vitamin D, or the violet rays. Those are facets of a larger discovery—one our own world knows nothing of.

"They've gone further. They've found out how to absorb those vital rays, and keep them from life. You saw the immense areas of desolation for miles around here? That's because this mirror and these machines have taken life away from whatever lived. Did you see what has been happening in Huayopata? That's because it has begun to affect all life—even humans."

"Dean," I said, "do you mean that what's killing those babies is here?"

CHAPTER IV

The Plan of Dr. Dean

"YES. And that's only the beginning. They've been working on

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a mirror farther in the valley. I've never seen it, but it completely dwarfs this one. It will be large enough to kill everyone on earth, not quickly, but by degrees. Bodies will waste away, but before they die, all food, all vegetables and plant life will have died. The newborn babies have been going first, because they're the weakest of all living creatures."

It's difficult to describe what these words did to me. They struck me like my first glimpse of the giants; it was too much to understand quickly. But as I realized what Dean was saying, I was filled with more fear than I had ever known, but a new fear, one completely apart from me.

"You see what drew me here," Dean was saying. "I was baffled by my experiments at the hospital, but when I tried coordinating the occurrence of these cases, one thing stuck. There seemed to be a central point of dissemination. I thought it might be a new disease, so I came alone. Had I suspected—but how could I possibly have dreamt of anything like this?"

"But why should they want to do anything like this?"

"Because the world of our forefathers killed them, conquered them. Because men like Pizzaro slaughtered, and they believe we are barbaric. Not actually. Auca, for instance, has attended Oxford. That map of the world behind him—they know better than that; they retain it because it was their ancestor's conception. But they are a peaceful people and they consider others as war-makers. Sooner or later, Auca says, the world would again try to kill his people. Therefore, they must kill first.

"But you see there is no malice in them," Dean continued. "They will let us both live because they have nothing against us as individuals. They fear and hate us collectively, as a civilization. These giants of theirs are ordinary Indians whom they kidnap from surrounding tribes. Since the absorbed sunlight must go somewhere, it goes into them, and they are almost a waste product—except that they form an admirable police body.

"You have seen how the large ones are controlled by what amounts to an artificial brain. The human brain cannot coordinate so large a body, but even a machine which is a thousand times more crude does it well enough. The giants perform a duty which is indispensable to the Incas: they keep plant life and trees from a natural tendency to grow here in such profusion that they would overwhelm the valley. Only the boundary trees are allowed to grow to any extent. A handful of seeds or spores dropped in the soil here would grow overnight into an immense jungle, but the area is kept free by the strange mist which kills most of them, and by the giants, who uproot the few which survive the mist."

When Dean had finished speaking, I was silent for a few moments. Presently I asked, "They offered you the same alternative they did me, of course?" Dean nodded. "And you chose to stay here?"

"I chose to live. As long as I'm alive, there's a chance that I'll get away in time to spread the warning. The best plan would have two sides to it. First, the terrible demonstration of the latent powers of these infernal mirrors. The world must be shaken into realizing something's happening. Second, someone must explain what will happen when the mirror shows its power. Several days ago I tried at last to escape. They caught me, drugged me. . . ."

Dean stopped suddenly. "I've been meaning to ask you," he said, "whether they hadn't shone a small copper light

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in your eyes?"

"Yes," I said. "Why?"

"Because that light is actually an anaesthetic. It would seem to bear out the molecular theory of light, since it actually appears to bombard the retina with matter which is absorbed directly into the brain."

"This sounds a bit confused," I began.

"Never mind," Dean said, hurriedly. "The point is, I know what the light does, even if I don't know specifically how. Now, if they gave you the light, how is it that you were up in time today to almost kill yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when they gave you the light, they undoubtedly gave you enough to keep you under until they wanted to waken you—yet you were awake when I came. Why?"

"Is it important?" I asked.

"EVERYTHING is important," Dean said, characteristically. "If you can somehow withstand the paralyzing effect of the light ray, without the Incas knowing it—then you're in a position to try escaping. That's how I got my chance. I made a glycerine film which I put over my eyes, shutting out part of the light. But I was still too tired to get far. Now if we only had—"

"Just a minute, Dean!" I cried. "Do you think the glasses I'm wearing had anything to do with it?"

"*What* glasses?"

"That's just it; you can't see them. Everyone's heard of them, but when they come across them—look carefully, Dean—don't you see the lenses up against my eyes? They're the new glasses people are wearing, invisible lenses shaped like the eyeball, lying right against it and held in place by the lids."

Dean stepped closer, his jaw tight. "By God, Thompson, you're right!" he muttered fiercely. "They're a tinted shade, aren't they?"

"A shade smoky. I had them made that way when I knew I was coming to a hot sun country."

"Then that's it! That's the answer!"

"Now what?"

"I've got it all worked out." Dean's eyes were glistening, and his voice was unsteady. "I've thought of nothing else for weeks. All the time I kept saying to myself, 'Have a plan, Dean, have a plan.' Because someday the chance might come and then there would be no time. And I did work out a plan, but I never felt I would have a chance—until now. The fact that you can really withstand—"

"Dean," I said, "I can't really withstand them. I can only recover quickly, judging from what you've told me."

"Look out," Dean snapped. "Here comes our keeper. Slip the lenses out and give them to me. I'll see you later."

I turned slightly to one side and slipped the lenses out of my eyes. Walking toward us from the other side of the great square was the Inca who had escorted us some minutes before. He approached and bowed his head politely.

"I believe it is time for Dr. Dean to return to his patients at the hospital?" Dean nodded to him, and the Inca said, "Then I will take it upon myself to show our city to Dr. Thompson."

Dean and I shook hands, and the lenses were in my right hand then. He turned away quickly and was gone. . . .

MANCO, the Inca, showed me the city for the next few hours. At another time I would probably have been completely fascinated by what I saw, for here were a people who had slept away from the rest of the world

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for centuries. The other-worldliness came from their whole attitude, from the way they walked and smiled and dressed, and bought vegetables in the market places, and the way the children played games. It was a curious mixture of a metropolis and a small country town such as one might find, say, in Mexico.

But I saw only with my eyes. Every moment I was wondering what Dean was doing, what his plan was. The evening could not come too soon for me.

IT was toward twilight, and Manco and I were walking in one of the many paved squares, when Dean came hurrying toward us. He and Manco exchanged bows again. "You are aware, Dr. Dean," said Manco, "that Dr. Thompson has not yet made his choice, and must therefore return to his elevated hut for the night?"

"Yes, of course. If you don't mind, the doctor and I will walk there ourselves." Smiling, as ever, Manco withdrew. "Clever, aren't they?" said Dean. "With night coming on, they expect me to guide you astray and let you make a run for it. There are probably half a dozen giants within telescopic sight of here, watching us every minute. But we're going to that hut."

"What's your plan?"

"When I shake hands with you later, I'll slip the lenses back to you. I've painted eyes on them on one side; the other side is coated over with a heavy coating: black phenothalein. When you put them under your lids, you'll be temporarily blind, but the light won't be able to come through."

"I don't think—"

"Don't interrupt," Dean almost snapped. "I tell you it's all worked out; I know them. Listen. When the giant takes you in his hand to put you back in the hut, slip the lenses in. Then turn around for a minute or so and face the opening. The Incas in the skull will then be shining that copper light in your eyes. Count twenty, then fall back and lie down. Count again, to one hundred, then take the lenses out.

"When you look out, you'll see the back of the giant's head very close to the hut. I'll take care of that in my own way. Now, at the back of the glass dome on the skull there is a long rod that moves in an arc. It's a safety device, the one the other giants threw in when that first giant went wild. If you move it down, the giant cannot be controlled from the skull. Reach out and pull the rod down. It may take the Incas a few minutes after that to open the skull, but they will. They won't know what's happened, because you'll never enter their minds . . ." Here Dean paused.

"Well?" I said.

"The rest is the key to the whole thing. It's going to be tough, and it's up to you."

"Go ahead."

Dean continued talking for the next few minutes, his face remaining entirely emotionless, except that he would smile now and again for no reason at all. I knew why; he was so sure we were being watched through telescopes as we walked. He finished just as we came to the first of the great trees that made the barrier.

"Dean," I said, "if this fails, it's the end. We can't kill Incas and expect to get away with it."

"We've got to get away with it—at least one of us," said Dean, passionately. "We're as good as dead anyway, unless you really want to make a bargain with them? This isn't a petty scheme or game. It's for keeps, for the highest stakes any man ever played for."

Just then he tapped me. Behind us

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our erstwhile escort, Manco, had appeared, and behind him the gigantic bulk of a giant loomed, coming closer.

"This is it," Dean whispered. "You're going back up now." He held out his hand and I gripped it. The two lenses were in his palm. "Good luck," he said.

Then he turned and walked to Manco. I knew he would be talking to him for the next few minutes. Manco had already switched on the little light that Dean had told me about, the signal to keep giants from treading him into dust.

CHAPTER V

Escape from the Titans

THINGS moved swiftly after that. The giant came in and lifted me abruptly, swinging me up in a single motion to the floor of the hut. My hands had moved as swiftly to get the lenses in place over my eyes. I had no way of knowing what the outside of the lenses looked like, but they were perfect for blinding me.

I faced the door to the hut and stood at the threshold, slowly counting twenty, wondering whether the copper light was actually being played at me. Then, gradually, I sank to the floor and stretched out, simulating sleep.

Below, I knew, Dean was also counting. When I reached a hundred, I took the lenses out of my eyes. From the ground a thin shout rang out. I jumped up and took my post at the door, peering down into the thickening gloom. Manco's little light was moving about in extreme agitation. I looked for the giant—saw him very near, but beyond reach—and again a shout came from below.

The light was moving erratically, but coming closer to the bottom of the great pole that held up my hut. I knew that Dean had already attacked Manco, and now he was forcing him closer. But would the giant come up from behind? Would he present the back of— There he was now, moving in! He was coming toward me. I ducked out of sight. When I peered again, the giant was very close; the men in the skull were trying to maneuver an approach which could guarantee that Manco would not be hurt if the giant lowered his fist.

The giant moved again. Evidently the struggle below was twisting in such a way that in an effort to follow the battle the giant's head had been turned almost directly with its back to me. Almost—and then it was four feet away. The rod stuck out darkly.

Holding on to the side of the hut with one hand, I leaned out over that drop of a hundred feet and gripped the lever. It had been made for a giant's hand, not mine. For a minute I thought I couldn't move it. Then the giant swung away, starting to move down, and when I refused to let go, the resulting momentary conflict swung the bar down in a single movement. It almost pulled me out of the hut, but frightened completely, I hung on and edged back into the hut.

The timing had been perfect! The giant was standing perfectly motionless, a balanced statue, one hand raised slightly higher than the other, feet close together, head barely bent over. There was no more noise from below, and I could see no movement within the dark skull. But all at once the outside of that great dome did quiver—and a small, triangular door, fitted so closely to the outline of the skull that it had been imperceptible, moved open. It was a leap of some three feet from there to the open doorway of my hut.

I gathered myself in the darkness, tense and waiting. The sleeper in the hut was to play his part. The first man

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crouched and essayed the short leap. As his foot touched the threshold, I stuck out an arm and pushed him out into space. He spun down and away to the dark earth below without as much as a gasp. I ducked back.

In the ensuing silence, I heard a voice nearby calling. It was the second Inca, standing at the triangular door, trying to pierce the darkness. Again he called. There could be no answer. And there was no conversation in the dome-shaped glass skull, which meant that there was but one more Inca.

Now suddenly he jumped. Just as I sprang to the doorway to push him out, another shape jumped with him, colliding in mid-air, and both hurtled into the hut. Swiftly I wheeled and gripped the first as he lay off-balance. There had been two others after all! Now the first twisted away, and the other, crouching, came for me in a sudden surge. I met his stomach with my head —lifted him bodily, whirled about and pushed him out into space, his arms and legs flailing wildly, a cry breaking from him.

THE last of the three Incas was waiting for me, his hands weaving before him like a wrestler. I stepped close, my heart leaping. One of his hands encircled my neck. I came up close to his body and lifted a punch up from my feet. The Incas knew nothing of fighting with fists! The poor wretch had been waiting for me to grapple with him. Now he went down suddenly in a limp heap. I stood momentarily undecided whether to throw him out or let him lie there. What harm could he be unconscious?

Leaving him there, I judged the distance back to the triangular door in the stationary giant's skull. Dean would be waiting. Then I leaped, caught the edge of that polished glass door, hurtled into the skull. One thing more. I reached out to the back of the skull, caught the lever again and moved it back up to where it had been when I first caught it.

Now the full ingenuity of Dean's plan come to flower. For, the giant having been arrested as he began to bend to the struggling humans below, was still set in his controls—and he now continued to finish the movement which had stopped several minutes before!

Clinging to whatever support I could grasp, I held on as the giant bent over. One of his hands reached out. Dean was waiting. He walked into the giant's palm. Then the great hand swung up again as the giant straightened. The giant brought the hand up directly before the glass skull. Then it stopped moving. Evidently the controls had been set only so far.

A small light gleamed in the giant's hand. Dean stood out in the contrast of that light, trying to work himself loose from the giant's loose grip. He clambered out over the fingers, then paused and leaped directly onto the skull. I followed the light as he slid across the skull to the back. In a moment he was through the door, beside me.

"Good work!" he muttered hoarsely. "Are you all right?"

He held up the light. His face was torn and bloody, stained with sweat and dirt. I mumbled something, but he had brushed past me, his eyes searching the machines within the skull. Then his fingers played lightly on a little balanced wheel.

I felt the giant quiver under me. Then he was moving. Again Dean's hands moved skilfully, this time over a board to one side where there were innumerable switches. The giant turned and his speed increased.

Dean and I had stolen a giant and

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our escape had begun!

For several minutes neither of us spoke. The giant moved ahead surely, his great legs covering the ground with astonishing speed. Presently, Dean said, "We should be clear by dawn—if the bodies aren't discovered before then."

"Did you kill Manco?" I asked.

"I had to. Used my scalpel. But I waited until the last minute. If he'd gotten away to spread the alarm—"

"Dean," I said, "there's one of them alive back there. I couldn't kill the third one after I'd knocked him out with—"

"Great God!" Dean cried. "You left one of them alive?" I nodded in affirmation. "That's just liable to do it," he said quietly. "Our only hope now is that his cries won't be heard until dawn when he comes to."

But when I looked at Dean's face, I knew what he thought . . .

IT was toward dawn the pursuit came close enough for me to see it, miles away. There were three glass skulls shining in the sun.

Now, momentarily, even as I turned to give the alarm to Dean, I thought back over the events of the night before—the giant skirting the city, always on the edge, always under the immense trees. Then the swiftly silent dash to the center of the sleeping, ancient city. The giant had stopped and Dean flicked the switches rapidly. The giant's hands had moved among the silent machines there, turning the great wheels that looked like arc lamps, spinning dials, disconnecting wires in a dozen places. And always there was Dean's face, dark and intense, his eyes burning in his head.

How many weeks he had planned all this! How many times he had gone over each movement, and how terribly hard he had studied, learning what everything meant. I had known the genius of Dr. Edward Dean before, but now I had the most profound evidence of it. There was nothing his fine intelligence could not grapple with successfully. "Pray that I've made no mistakes," he had said. "If it works, the results will be terrible enough to bring action immediately. But we need time—*time*—and a chance to get where we can explain what will happen the minute the sun hits that mirror in the morning."

Then on again, on and on through

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the night, the giant running tirelessly. The edge of the gorge, and the painful maneuvering of the immense bulk up the jagged sides of the rock breaking through the mist. And on again, over the barren ground and through the great dead forest, across fields and valleys and streams. And always Dean quiet, watching the giant's responses. When the sun finally came up and most of the distance had been covered, he had looked out anxiously, and the disappointment had etched lines in his face. I had kept thinking of what would happen when we brought this giant into one of the Peruvian villages . . .

But it was all useless. Behind us then were three great giants, and each step brought them closer. Dean couldn't manage our giant as well as the Incas. Moment after moment they were closer.

"Thompson," Dean clipped, "get ready to make a run for it. Remember everything I told you. Open that door. I'm going to have the giant set you down. Then you're on your own, and Godspeed."

"What about you?"

"Somebody's got to stay here and

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head them off. You can't manage the giant. Get out and I'll fight them off till you're clear. Hide somewhere—now open that door!"

"But Dean, if—"

"Open that door!" Dean shouted, the veins in his neck knotting. "This isn't just you or me. *Get out!"*

I opened the door. Still on the run, the giant reached back and held his hand open for me. I climbed into his palm. He slowed down and the next moment I was on the ground in the jungle.

In the near distance I could hear the great feet thrashing through the foliage, upsetting everything in their way. With a sudden lurch, the giant whirled about and disappeared in the direction of the sounds.

Moments later I heard the first dull thunder of the meeting of the giants in the forest. The ground heaved under me and mighty trees swayed as if in a hurricane, but I ran on and on until I came to a tiny cave in the side of a hillock. There I hid until the frightful thrashing in the forest died away.

Thirst finally dragged me from my hiding place. In the quiet, the cracking sounds of my unpracticed feet were like rifle shots, but no one came. I was still an untold number of miles from the first of the villages near Cuzco, and I was without food or water or arms.

It was late at night when I stumbled into a settlement of Indians. I must have been a horrible sight. I could hardly stand from exhaustion; my clothes were rags. The villagers washed me, gave me a place to sleep. . . .

CHAPTER VI

The Hand of Death

THAT was the beginning of my return to Huayopata and, subsequently, Lima. On the evening of the day after the Indians had cared for me, I was in Dr. Alfarez' private office. He had greeted me diffidently, his eyes far off somewhere. He thought I had been in Lima, trying to find Dean there. He felt, clearly, that he had been abandoned.

I had no patience for his personal feeling. "What happened this morning?" I asked, as soon as he stopped his complaining. Quietly, he told me. That morning four babies had died in childbirth—all the hospital had had—but three others had died who were more than a year old. And there were others dying all over Huayopata. There was nothing anyone could do. In his sorrow, Alfarez was retreating to a religious mysticism.

"God is punish us, *Senor,"* he said softly. "He will wipe us out."

"Nonsense! I've found Dean—and he knows what's happening here. Wait until I've phoned around a bit."

The mention of Dean's name had shaken Alfarez a little, and he sat listening to me call. I called the surrounding towns, Echarate, Quilcanca, Urubamba, across the river to Santa Ana, across the Apurimac to San Miguel. In San Miguel the news was catastrophic.

In the other towns there had been an increase in deaths, but in San Miguel over three hundred infants of four years or less had died in the streets, in their cribs, in their gardens. But there also had been an appalling number of deaths—of old people. Almost as many elderly men and women had died with the coming of the dawn.

The little mountain town was half insane with grief and reasonless anger. The wires were humming through to Lima. I called Lima—the Consulate—on the phone and heard what they said: epidemic. Sending down a health commission. I hung up savagely.

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Then I told Alfarez the whole story, leaving out nothing.

He kept shifting his seat toward the end, and he looked away from me. When I had finished, he stood by the window, smoking a cigarette. "*Senor* Thompson," he said, "how many days you were lost in the jungle when you look for *Senor* Dean?"

"Is that all you have to say?" I said, slowly, regarding him. "What's that got to do with what I'm telling you? Think, man, *think!* If they let go with that new mirror—"

"Excuse me, *Senor* Thompson. You say the *pequenos*, the babies, they die because *Senor* Dean do something?"

"No, I didn't say that at all. I said that Dean arranged the mirror during the night. He set it so that when the sun hit it, instead of the mirror working in the circle, drawing life off in a radial pattern—he fixed it so that it would aim somewhere in particular, so that one place, being hard hit, could get some attention. And I can explain it! Don't you see it?"

"Excuse me once again, *Senor*, if I say again how many days you were in the jungle?" He cleared his throat. "Bad things happen to you, *si?*"

I caught it then, like a blow that almost made me want to kill him. "*Alfarez!*" I shouted. "*Are you trying to tell me that you think I'm crazy?*"

"No, no, *Senor!*" he cried as I came toward him. "Of course. *Unos momentos*. I come back in a moment."

He edged to the door and slipped through. When I looked down the dingy white corridor, I saw him running. I don't know why I waited, but I did. Ten minutes later, a little, dark-skinned nurse opened the door. There were two swarthy country police with her, and all three came in. "The Doctor Alfarez, he say he no . . . no come back today. Too busy. Say please not wait. *Gracias.*"

There was nothing else to do. The nurse stood back, and the policemen with her. I got up and left.

In my mind I could see Dean sitting in that cursed glass skull, waving goodbye to me as he turned the monster around to go back and battle for my chance to escape. To escape to what? To this? Dean; where was he now?

That afternoon I hired an old Ford and a frightened young boy to take me to San Miguel. We were hours getting there.

SAN MIGUEL was a madhouse. There was no one to see. The American consular attaches had all gone to Lima to report. The Peruvian officials were scattered throughout the city. The health commission had begun to arrive, and already they had ordered a row of houses burned to the ground and signs saying DISEASE in three languages had been put up. Funeral cortèges wound their sorrowful way through the dirty streets. Frightened children clinging to their parents filled the air with their incessant wailing, and over everything the heat came down . . . the sun . . . the malevolent sun, beating down, killing. . . .

I got into the car and drove to Lima alone. The boy had disappeared somewhere, leaving the car with me. I was in Lima by the afternoon of the next day.

There was nothing at all unusual there. Lima was the same. There were still the scattered Americans at the waterfront cafes, drinking their rum and calling out to the pretty girls as they went by. The flower sellers roamed everywhere, ducking the automobiles of ancient vintage that always appeared around an unlikely corner, horns blaring like ten thousand geese. Ladies in coaches, parasols up, drove by.

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The American Consulate was a bit more active than when I had last seen it. Inside I told a clerk whom I wanted to see. He came back a quarter of an hour later and waved me in. Major Peregrine was sitting with both boots on his desk, a tall glass in his hand. He motioned to another on the table near me.

"Have a drink, Dr. Thompson. What do you want to see me about? I'm afraid I haven't much time. Riding appointment with a lady. Lovely lady."

"I didn't come here to drink," I said evenly. The tone of my voice was a mistake, perhaps, but I couldn't help it. "I've come to talk to you about Dr. Dean, my colleague, and what happened yesterday in San Miguel."

"Hmmmm," said the Major, his feet sliding off. "So you're that Dr. Thompson. Didn't connect you with—" he broke off.

"With what?"

"As a matter of fact, Doctor, Dr. Alfarez of the Central Hospital of Huayopata called me yesterday."

"I see. You don't want to listen?"

"Not at all. I'm rather interested. Terribly interested, in fact. The Rockefeller Foundation's been inquiring about you, you know."

I took the drink then and swallowed it at a gulp. Then I told him the same story I had told Alfarez. His reactions were hidden for some moments. He tapped a pencil, then wrote a few lines. "Well, Doctor," he said, presently. "How would you account for the deaths of old people, together with children?"

"The machine sucks away life from the weakest first," I said. "If it were allowed to go on indefinitely, it would affect us all, but those relatively weakest would continue going all the time." The Major was silent. "You see," I added, "I don't know much about it. Only Dean knows it all—and God knows what happened to him. We've got to go back there and save him if he's alive, and if he isn't, we've got to put an end to this."

"Just what do you propose, Dr. Thompson?"

"Send army planes there. Send an armed force. Bomb the place."

"On what evidence? On what you told me just now? Hold on a moment. Can't we be reasonable for a few moments, Doctor? Let us suppose that what you say is so. How would planes find a place hidden by—ah—mist? And how could we arrange to transport an armed force through wild country without first getting to the bottom of these—ah—giants you tell of?"

"How do you propose getting to the bottom?" I said.

"Well, to tell the truth, it would be no simple matter. But first, we'll write Washington the whole thing and see what they say. Meanwhile you can stay in Lima and sort of take things—ah—easy for a while."

"Major," I said. "Don't you believe me? Just tell me."

"OF course I believe you, Doctor. But you don't understand—"

"It's you who doesn't understand. While we're sitting here and talking, those Incas are working on that larger mirror. How much longer will they take, knowing that I got away? How much time is there? You want to write Washington. I tell you we must move immediately!"

"Impossible, my dear fellow. You just don't order bombers—and whose bombers, by the way—American or Peruvian? Order them to bomb some misty gorge because—"

I rose, interrupting him. "Because I'm telling you if you don't, your whole precious scheme of things will be wiped out!" I cried. "Because there'll be no

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more you, or Lima, or any place! Because Ed Dean found all this, and he's somewhere in a Peruvian jungle dead, trying to tell you!"

The Major rose after me. "Really, Dr. Thompson, you force me to say things common politeness would otherwise avoid. I know you've been working under difficulties, and that this plague in San Miguel must affect you deeply. But you've got to take hold of yourself."

"In fewer words, you think I'm crazy?"

"Overworked, my dear Doctor. That, and Dr. Dean's disappearance, undoubtedly a fine man and a friend of yours. And the trek you took through the jungle did you no good. I tell you frankly that you're heading for a nervous breakdown, if you will pardon my presumption."

"You won't do anything?"

"Under the circumstances, no. Doctor, I give you my word that the epidemic in San Miguel will be beaten. It may take—"

Those were the last words I heard as I went through the door.

I must have seen a hundred people during the next day—or tried to see them. But the word had been passed around. They were all out, or busy, or they could give me but a moment. At the end of that day I was frightened more than I had ever been. The deaths in San Miguel had not recurred. The papers carried the news of how quick action by the Health Commission had wiped it out in a day. And nowhere was there anyone who would listen.

All the time there was one thing running through my mind. Dean . . . Dean . . . Dean. . . . The events in that unknown city in the heart of the mountains came back to me at night with terrifying clarity, and I lived through them all again. Somewhere a race from the dead past had managed to survive and it was busy night and day, entombing its hatred in a machine to kill. When would the blow strike?

The next morning I wired home, telling my supervisor of the letter I was writing. They wired back immediately. *Dr. Aljarez already communicated. Order you return New York at once, otherwise immediate dismissal.*

I had reached the end.

But had I? Dean . . . Dean . . . I kept thinking, remembering, thinking of one little phrase of his. . . .

I needed *time*. Time to convince people. Time to show them what was happening, to beat into their stubborn heads that I was telling them something vital to their lives, to the lives of all of us. And to get time, I had to take it from the hidden race in the unknown city. Single-handed. It would have to be that way now. And the chance phrase of Dean's had given me the answer—a phrase characteristic of Dean's thorough, scientific mind, for he had found out everything there was to know about that strange land of the sun.

I went back to Cuzco, and spent the last of my money outfitting myself. I was afraid the police would question me about the boy Palo, but it never happened. This time I was taking no one with me. I knew it was my life now, but I was fighting for time.

And the most valuable part of my equipment was a little leathern bag filled with acorns.

Thus began the last chapter of my search for Dean and what came after I found him.

CHAPTER VII

The Golden Man

I WAS five days coming back to the gorge. Day followed day, and I went on relentlessly, my brain on fire. After

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the second day there were no habitations, no sign of life. Sometimes I recognized a place I had seen before, a great stone, a fertile valley. The dead forest needed no identification. I had looked for the place where Dean had left me, with no success, and I pushed on. Often I was thirsty for hours before I found a stream, for there was no Palo to hear the far-off tinkle of mountain brooks now. Hunger fought with my race against time, for I begrudged every minute my body demanded aside from the task of going farther.

On the morning of the fifth day, shortly before noon, I came to the gorge. Afraid to venture out in the open, I retreated again, past the barren area, and hid there all day, waiting for the merciful darkness. The sun was a hot ball of vengeance, burning my skin, drying out the water in my canteen.

When it was dark, I approached the gorge and lowered myself into the great bowl. The descent was slow, and in the darkness I almost fell several times. At length, the wall ended and I stood on level ground. Some time later I reached the wall of the giant trees, and I followed them around.

It would be hopeless trying to find the giant mirror that night. Dean had never seen it, and I had no way of knowing where it might be. But there was one way. After a time I crept through the curtain of trees, found one of the radial streets. Stealthily, not knowing when death might come, I headed for the center of the city. In the dark quiet, my heart was like the beating of a jungle warning.

Once, ahead, I glimpsed a little light moving about. I remained stationary until it moved away. Later I heard the soft pat of great feet and looked up to see a giant swinging by on the path outside, oblivious of me.

At length the circular center of the city lay before me. I crouched and ran across the paved square to the mirror. From my pack I took a small drill, set it in the earth, and drilled a hole through the paving, at an angle that reached under the mirror's cradle. Then I threw an acorn into the hole and covered it again.

I had done the same thing in four other places around the mirror, when I saw lights moving toward me—lights and huge shadows. To be caught now was to lose everything. This was only the beginning of my plan. I fled precipitately through the gloom and shouts rang out behind me.

The one thing that saved me was the fact that the giants had had to watch out for the Incas below them, who had started to chase me. In the extra minute I gained, I reached the fringe of the trees and began working my way down the far end of the valley.

Finally I came to the solitary pole which held up the hut in which I had been imprisoned. From my pack I took out a pair of claws, such as telephone linesmen use, fastened them around my legs. Then I began climbing up the hundred feet to the hut. At the top of the pole, I took out a hatchet, hacked away part of the floor and climbed through.

I needed another day—to find out whether the acorns would really work, to find the large mirror as a result. And that had meant that I would need a place of absolute safety for a whole day. What safer place could there have been than this hut?

Impatiently I waited for morning. The climb had used all my reserve energy, but the darkness had shut out the danger of my height. Still, I had not known fear—fear in the old sense of the word—since I had started for the city of the Incas. It wasn't bravery; it was just that I was more afraid for

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others than for myself. . . .

I must have fallen asleep, for I woke to hear a great wailing sound. It was early morning. I jumped up and looked out of the hut, from a position against one of the walls. Naturally, the way it faced, I could see nothing. The wailing did not diminish. It hung in the air like a cry from the earth itself.

I began to drill a fairly large hole in the back wall of the hut. It was dangerous business, but I had to see what had happened.

Sharp cracks burst out somewhere, two, three in succession. After each one the keening rose in waves, filled with sorrow. I looked through the hole I had made, hoping to see the—

It was impossible to miss it. From the center of the city five great oaks rose, higher than anything else. Growing right at the heart of the mirror, they had probably grown a thousand feet in several minutes. Straight and proud they stood, their brilliant leaves like green shields in the sun, still growing bit by bit. Again and again the cracks rang out.

That was the mirror that the oaks had shattered to bits when they began to grow underneath it with the coming of the sun. The mirror had been completely destroyed. There was still the second and larger one.

I KNEW what would happen now. Incas and giants were everywhere, searching, beating out the trees, the foliage, leaving not a corner unturned, hunting for me. They must have known it was I, and they must have known what I was figuring to do next. At least, that was the way I had planned it, for only if they suspected my intentions could they help them.

And they worked! Toward afternoon, with each unsuccessful hour of searching driving them closer to panic —how many times I glimpsed Incas in the glass skulls with their faces set and pale—they began sending giants in one direction down the valley. That meant they were going to guard the second mirror, the larger one. I studied the general direction that the giants took. The next step was to outguess them again.

The Incas, having seen one night attack, would undoubtedly wait for another. They would never expect me to come up in broad daylight—but that, exactly, was what I had to do. There was no other way.

I took off my clothes and dressed in a short tunic which I had had made in Cuzco. Under it I carried the bag of acorns. I darkened my skin with a thin layer of a theatrical makeup cream. A band went around my head, fibre sandals on my feet. Then I strapped the linesmen's claws to my bare legs and prepared to climb down. The whole descent was going to be made in daylight!

I studied my surroundings for several minutes before I took the plunge. Luck was with me, more than I ever expected, but without luck I would have been dead long before. I made the descent fast enough to fill my hands with splinters, but I was safe. I hid the claws and headed for the trees, going where I had seen the giants go.

Presently I was in the city. People stood everywhere, gazing at the five oaks that rose from the center, their eyes filled with tears. Now and again a vast sigh rose from them as if they were one person. I moved slowly to avoid being conspicuous.

As I kept walking I fell more and more in line with small groups that were heading the same way I was. Evidently there was some sort of a pilgrimage to the new shrine, now that the old was destroyed. The Incas were Sun wor-

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shippers, I knew, and what had happened was more than a matter of their weapon having been destroyed; it was their religion, their god.

The city dropped away and still we walked. Sometimes someone spoke to me in a strange language. I never answered. I kept my eyes on the ground and sighed, or called their "aie—ee" softly, and it worked. Then I saw the cradle of the new mirror.

It stood atop an immense structure made of solid granite. The building was a bowl with row on row of stairs, like seats, leading away from it. In the center lay the mirror, a sluggish, magnificent stream of gold. The mirrors of the Incas were evidently made of a liquid which solidified, and this one—I realized suddenly that I couldn't hope to smash this mirror the same way, because it wasn't working yet. The acorns would grow, but not fast enough to keep the giants from uprooting them. Only if they had grown under the very mirror as it was in operation would there be any guarantee.

There was one other way. I might not see it, but I would know that when the mirror was finally started, that it would be smashed. I could throw the acorns into the liquid mirror! When it solidified, the mirror would tear itself to pieces, as it took life from the sun.

With others, I went down to the mirror itself. In my hand I already held half a dozen acorns. As the others salaamed and bowed, on their knees before the mirror, so did I. Only I threw the acorns out of my open hand. They fell into the golden lake and disappeared from sight.

But the next moment I became aware of what was happening around me. All the people near me had backed away and were looking at me, pointing and talking. Had they seen me? Were they calling someone? From a nearby point several Incas started on the run toward me—

Too late it occurred to me what I had done. I had dressed like Manco, who was a noble. But undoubtedly nobles didn't kneel in the open with the common people, for there were others around who had remained standing.

They had not seen me throw in the acorns, but I was doomed just the same. It was a matter of moments before they would have me, but I began running. If only I could make it back to the place where the hut was—outdistance them long enough to be able to climb back to safety. Foolish thought. They were breathing on my neck. Everyone in the place had taken up the cry.

I was cornered! There were others coming directly for me! I turned again, leaping up to the low wall that bordered the lake, and just then one of the Incas seized me from behind. I kicked out, felt my foot sink into his belly—then I was falling directly into the molten gold mirror! My balance had been precarious at best—the kick had destroyed it.

I remember the way I felt during that hundredth of an instant as I fell. I was surprised more than anything, and disappointed. I had come so far. Then I hit the mirror. It didn't splash. It was like falling on sponge rubber. The mirror just took me as if it were absorbing a blow. It was fairly cool and it clung to the skin. I lay there a moment, then I rose. My feet kept sinking in and I had to keep moving.

I looked up at the Incas. They were terror-stricken, silent, on their knees wherever they had chanced to be. Not a sound came from them, not a soul looked at me; it was as if I were someone from the dead.

The gold of the mirror covered me like another skin. What had it done? Was I the object of terror or of awe? I only knew that as I climbed out of the

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cradle, the people covered their eyes and lay prone on the ground. I was either a god or a demon, something divine or accursed—but I was inviolate. No one would touch me. Few dared to look at me a second time. I remember how grateful I was then, how close to religious mysticism I was then myself. I wanted to thank Dean for saving me. . . .

I WILL never forget how I walked through that city of the Incas, in my golden skin. Everywhere I went the cries that rose up made me shudder. The people fell to the ground, weeping, moaning. Sometimes the whole city seemed to be crying as if it were one individual. Looking back I could see the five oaks standing proudly. I knew that someday soon there would be other oaks farther down the city. They would give me time to tell people. . . .

A week later I was back in Cuzco. I went from there directly to Lima. Unfortunately, word had come from the consular attache in Cuzco that I had been scaring natives out of their wits, acting as a sun god. That was because the gold would not come off my skin for days, and some of the natives were actually frightened.

The upshot was that when I came to Lima, the Major wouldn't see me, nor would anyone else. My job was gone and I had precious little money. I took a boat and came home to New York.

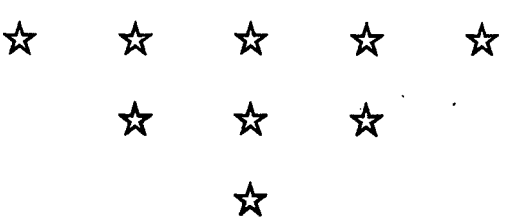
I've told my story here before, told it so often people are sick of hearing it. I'm sick of telling it. No one believes me. I show them news clippings from newspapers; from *El Dia* of Huayopata, *Noticia* from San Miguel, columns from the *English and Spanish Journal of Lima*—they shrug. I show them little things I saved, like the lenses which Dean painted—they smile politely. I ask them what happened to Dr. Edward Dean—they shrug. The American Consulate is still officially hunting him.

But no one has done anything. No one has moved a little finger. How much do I ask? Only that some effort be made to verify my story. Let someone go back with me. I will pay all the expenses. But let this someone be an official, on an official mission, and let him be someone who will be believed, and at the risk of my life, I will prove what I say.

Listen to me. *This story has not ended.* Each day that passes, in a remote part of South America, in the bare mountains of Peru, a race of people forgotten by time, unknown to the world, is working. And unless that work is stopped, God alone knows what may happen. The mirror I fell into may be a ruin by now—*but they will build another. They are undoubtedly building another now.*

Ed Dean is dead. There is no one who can vouch for my story, but the story is not ended.

Something has to be done. Do you understand? *Something has to be done.*



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THE MAN WHO SAW

By THORNTON AYRE

▲

Blind Ralph Marshall's sight slowly returned, but it wasn't his own world he saw. It was another, where a scientist worked at an awful plot.

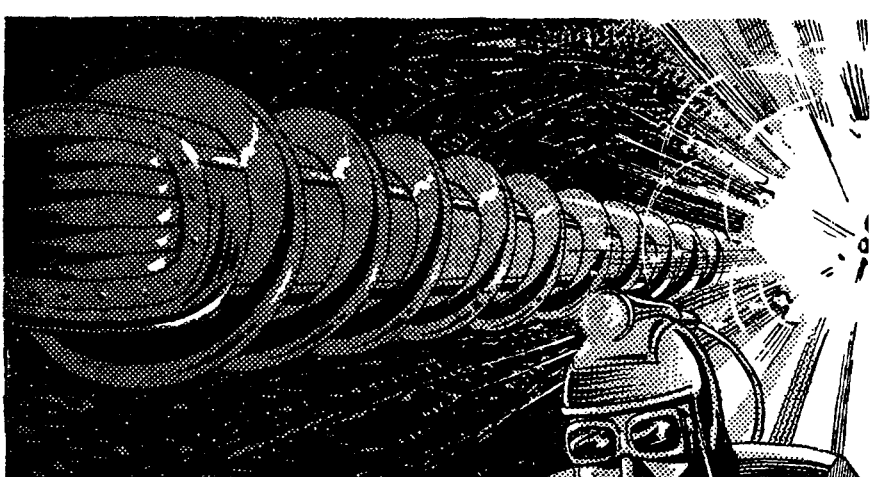
▼

RALPH MARSHALL never knew what really happened. One minute he was carrying on his normal work as mining engineer, supervising the drilling of the giant shaft which it was hoped would one day pass under the Atlantic Ocean from the United States to Britain—and the next there was the sound of smashing concussion in his ears and blinding light before his eyes. He stumbled and fell amidst a rain of tumbling rocks, props, and underpinnings. . . .

Voices merged out of darkness. Sounds of instruments clinking and tinkling in glass vessels. Ralph Marshall felt throbbing pain throughout his body. He stirred and winced. A nurse's voice spoke to him gently.

"Just relax, Mr. Marshall. You'll be all right."

He obeyed perforce, piecing together the past events. There was a wadding of bandages across his eyes, tight binding round his arm. It felt as though his



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leg were in a plaster cast. But his biggest worry was the dark—total, pitchy. Had his sight gone? Had it been destroyed in the mine blow-out? That was something he did not dare to think about.

But as hours and days slid by, as days slipped into weeks, as the rest of his body healed and his eyes did not, he began to realize the truth. He realized it all the more clearly when the bandages were unwound from his face and he raised his eyelids. The darkness remained unchanged.

"Doc!" he shouted hoarsely, gripping the hand that held him. "Doc, what's wrong with me? I can't see! Everything's . . . black!"

The voice of Dr. Talford Flint, chief doctor of the hospital, sounded as impartial as ever.

"Just sit here, Mr. Marshall, while we take a look at you."

Ralph fumbled for the high backed chair and fell into it, sat motionless, breathing hard, staring into the abyss. He heard the whirr and buzz of electrical machinery, the mutter of voices in consultation.

Suddenly, sharp questions stabbed from the dark.

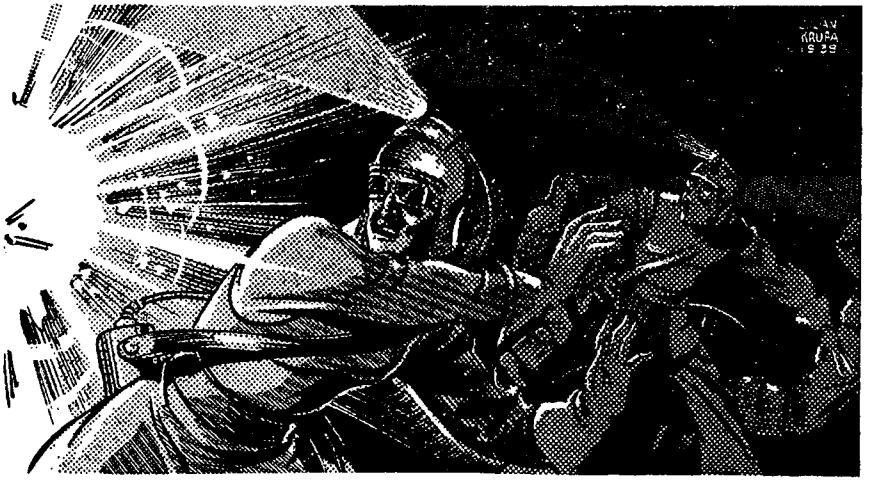
"Can you see this? No? Well—*this!* No reaction? Hm . . ."

More muttering. Dr. Flint's voice rose higher than the others with its sharp, acid sting.

"The eyes react normally, I tell you! Optic nerves are quite in order. Maybe a case of temporary shock. Nonsense, man!" he scoffed at somebody. "Nonsense! Cannot be the brain-centers . . ."

Ralph sprang up suddenly. "Would somebody mind telling me what the devil's going on in here?" he demanded, almost with a touch of hysteria. "Stop cackling, can't you, and let me have the truth!"

Flint's voice replied, monotonously calm. "If we could tell you what *is*



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wrong with your eyes, Mr. Marshall, we would do so—but we cannot! They answer to every one of our tests, and for that reason you should be able to see. That you cannot see is something we are unable to explain. It's—it's temporary blindness and will pass off eventually, just as snow-blindness does."

"And supposing it doesn't?" Ralph stood mastering himself. He went on desperately, "There must be *somebody* who can diagnose, surely?"

"In this room are the best experts in optics, Mr. Marshall," Flint retorted. "Your firm insisted on the best possible specialists to examine you. That has been done. It is simply a case of your eyes not answering to normal optical laws, that's all. We can do nothing more to help you—but keep on calling nonetheless so we can note an improvement the moment it appears. We'll keep thorough track of your case, of course."

Ralph smiled bitterly. Thorough track! That was the last thing he could imagine this cold-blooded fish, Talford Flint, ever doing. Though he had never yet seen him he had long since summed up the man's nature from his ruthless voice.

RALPH said quietly, "Well, thanks . . ." A hand caught his arm. He could tell by the cool draft when he was in the main passage. Then another hand caught him—a strong hand he immediately recognized, that of Ed Rutter, his assistant engineer on the Shaft.

"Good to see you around on your pins again, Ralph." Ed's voice was genuinely pleased. "How's tricks?"

"Not so hot, I guess." Ralph fingered his dark glasses and gave a brief account of the medico's edict as they passed down the steps together.

"They're crazy!" was Ed's summing up. "I dragged you out of that blow-out myself. You got a smack on the head, a cracked leg, and a burned arm —nothing more. You'll be O.K., don't worry. In the meantime you can hitch to me. I'll keep the flies off you."

"That," Ralph said quietly, "is the part I don't like. You know I'm not built to rely on other people. I've got to do things myself, with my own two hands— Oh, hell, why did this have to happen to *me?*"

Ed said philosophically, "I suppose things can happen to the best of us. Stop worrying, man. Just keep on digging in with me at the apartment until you get right again."

Ralph gripped the strong hand gratefully. He needed no words to convince him of the tough, red-haired engineer's loyalty. Ed Rutter was the sort of man who'd give his right arm in defense of somebody he really liked.

There was a long silence between them after that. Then after a while Ralph noted from the increasing roar of traffic that they had come into the heart of New York. In his mind's eye he could see the way to their apartment, could also see the three-mile distance of criss-crossing streets which led to the vast excavations at the Shaft entrance. Three times a shaft had been attempted, and still it was incomplete.

For Ralph all that was over now, he felt. He had to pattern a new sort of life. He had money saved, plenty of it. The firm had intimated they would grant him a life pension. Did that imply that they thought he would never . . . ? He crushed the thought from his mind.

Over the meal in the apartment Ed's voice went on in forced cheeriness. Ralph did not listen to all the things he said. His thoughts were on his immediate predicament. Then he started violently as the alarm clock went off—

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that infernal clock, always going off at the wrong time, moving itself along the mantelshelf by the very vibration of its ringing.

Ed leapt for it, jammed on the silencer.

"Tell you what," he said, turning again. "Why not let me go and get you one of those dogs? You know—eyes of the blind, and all that. I don't want to rub it in, but you *could* get about."

"Thanks—no," Ralph answered curtly. "I haven't given up hope yet, Ed. A dog to run around with me would sort of make me feel tied down. I'll get better—somehow."

"But until you do—"

"Oh, quit worrying me, can't you?" Ralph blazed.

Ed relaxed and lighted a cigarette. Ralph crushed out his own cigarette with strong, knotty fingers. Thereafter he drummed on the table with a definite desperation of spirit.

IN the ensuing days Ralph Marshall debated many courses of action. Should he just vanish from sight? Should he put an end to himself? He did not consider it would be cowardice: he was a firm believer in ridding the world of useless material, organic or inorganic. He might . . . No: there was always the thought he might recover.

A week passed. In that week his moods were those of a man driven to distraction. He had periods of smouldering calm; then he flew into berserk rages, ranted, finally apologized—and Ed Rutter came from and went to work on the Shaft with calm, cheerful understanding. He knew only too well the ordeal his dynamic, energetic friend was undergoing.

Then something happened! One of the mornings when he was left alone as usual Ralph noticed something queer. There was a puncture in the abyss of darkness—a tiny hole of light!

Ralph's whole being suddenly exploded with hysterical delight. He sat staring at that hole, rolling his eyes to make sure, but whichever way he turned his eyes the hole remained. It was perhaps as large as a pea. Straining to the utmost, he tried to analyze what he saw. He held his hand before his face, but for some reason could not see any trace of his hand at all in the hole. Not that that discouraged him: he remained confident that he would do so before long.

He phoned the news to Ed down in the Shaft. That evening they had a celebration supper on the strength of it. From then on Ed was as keenly interested as Ralph himself in the gradual expansion of that hole day by day. Once or twice Ralph toyed with the idea of going back to the hospital for an examination, then decided against it. Better to get himself wholly well before being tested and proven all right for work again.

The hole grew. With the growth came a sense of dawning wonder to Ralph. Four days later it was large enough to encompass a quarter of his vision, but he was not looking at anything in the apartment! He walked in bewilderment from room to room, but he never saw a familiar thing, and certainly failed to observe the furniture with which he collided. And yet the scene changed as he moved about. He saw things which, in their partial state, he could not understand or reconcile. Otherwise it seemed he was as blind as ever. He still could not see his waving hands in front of his face, could not see a sign of anything immediately around him.

His first hopes began to diminish, but not entirely. There was definite interest in watching the development of re-

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turning sight—though what sort of a world he was going to look into he dared not imagine.

He purposely kept most of the truth from Ed, only told him enough to let him believe he was recovering very gradually. In another week the vision was completely clear to Ralph, and sitting on the divan in the living room one morning with his dark glasses off, he gazed—and gazed.

HE was alone in the apartment; he knew that—but instead of being in the apartment he was apparently sitting on the sidewalk of a tremendously long main street. He gazed down it steadily, remarking the absolute clarity of detail. People passed him constantly but never glanced at him—busy people, men and women, just as he had always known them, except that their attire was rather different to prevailing fashion. It struck him as curious, but here and there people came straight toward him and passed on—*through* him! He was convinced of it after a while, and the sensation was startling.

He studied this particular section of city carefully. It was not familiar in the least, was apparently a mass of rearing towers. Here and there were bullet-nosed rocket airplanes, far in advance of any known to 20th Century civilization.

The buildings seemed to have millions of windows. Directional towers for aircraft were atop every edifice. There were car parks high in the air, floor upon floor, driven by endless belt systems. All ground space was devoted to traffic ways and open parks, with special sidewalks for pedestrians.

Even the traffic was peculiar. There was not a single recognizable make of automobile in sight, and what there were moved silently and swiftly. It was odd, Ralph reflected—in fact fantastic. He could see all this activity, which should have made the din of a supermodern city, yet all he could hear was the pounding tick of that old fashioned alarm clock on the mantel. He closed his eyes momentarily and the vision was shut out; but it was there again when he opened them once more.

His exact emotions were unfathomable. In one sense he was profoundly disappointed because he was obviously as blind as ever; yet in another he was aware of a feeling of triumph at being the dissociated observer of something bafflingly complex. This required study.

So to Ed Rutter he only gave brief reports and wore dark glasses whenever Ed was about. But week after week thereafter he studied the city by day and night, the periods of daylight and darkness corresponding exactly with those of the normal world.

Among other things Ralph took advantage of Ed's suggestion. He got a dog. Thereby he was enabled to extend the scope of his activity. At first he was faced with considerable confusion. Walking down the main street in the other city, for instance, demanded walking through a New York emporium and leaving by the back entrance! To gain elevation and study the city properly he had to go to the top of New York's highest buildings.

E v e r y w h e r e his dog unfailingly guided him. Everywhere the faces of the Others looked unseeingly at him. He was the invisible observer of a great, mysterious, busy world.

It was perhaps inevitable that the vision of this new world should affect Ralph with increasing force. His body was in the normal world, but sight was elsewhere! He got into the habit of calling to the people passing by him—and getting no answer of course—of repeating the various proclamations on the signs and posters he saw, all of them

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in an unknown language. He began to build up a small vocabulary, both from looking at newspapers over people's shoulders and watching the things they did, or the things they indicated, when they spoke. He became gradually adept in lip reading.

There was something else too. In this other plane matter was no barrier to him. He passed through walls and people as easily as people passed through him. Yet of course it was impossible for him to touch anything.

Ralph forgot his caution as time went on. His interest was utterly absorbed. On more than one occasion Ed was surprised to find him in the act of apparently talking to himself in unknown jargon, staring straight before him while he did it. It worried Ed not a little. He thought he took the right course when he reported the matter back to the hospital.

ACCORDINGLY the hospital contacted Ralph's firm. They in turn made arrangements, and one morning Dr. Flint himself and two other experts turned up at the apartment.

Once the brief examination was over Ralph sat in his bedroom, waiting, listening to the voices floating through the fanlight over the door.

"I cannot help but think he needs attention, gentlemen," Ed was saying earnestly. "Being left alone too much maybe. Probably affecting his mind. He talks to himself, does queer things. He even thinks at times that he is in a street when standing in this room!"

Ralph did not catch the answer, but he got to his feet and entered the living room suddenly. He sensed the sudden expectancy his arrival created.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "I think there is something you should know. I can see." He took off his dark glasses. "I see, but I do not see you! I do not even see New York. No; I see another world, another city, another race of people. At this very moment I am looking down the main street."

Still there was silence.

"Well, have you nothing to say?" Ralph demanded. "Aren't you even going to try and find out what is wrong? I suppose I should have told you this sooner, but I was waiting for you to tell *me*. Only you didn't! If you can't find out the truth then let me get a man who will. There's Dr. Brutus Lloyd, for instance. He was with me at college once—"

"I hardly think we need to consider the so called merits of Dr. Lloyd at this moment," broke in Flint's curt voice. Then in a more conciliatory tone he went on, "We are well able to take care of you, Mr. Marshall. If you will accompany us back to the hospital where we have all the instruments we will see what we can do."

"It's obviously an optical defect," Ralph said, as he put back his glasses and was helped into his coat. "You know—embracing an angle in space which we cannot see under normal conditions. These other people *do* exist, and their city is much improved on ours."

"Of course—of course." Dr. Flint sounded as though he was humoring a lunatic.

Ralph was full of inner doubts as he was driven through the streets. Dimly through his dark glasses he could see apparent buildings whirling towards him, through which the car passed like vapor. The whole mad other-plane was careening round in dizzying circles. He felt himself sway a little when he finally alighted from the car. He was taken up in an elevator and seemed to rise up the face of a building. He became stationary half way up and fell into a chair. Once his glasses were removed he found

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himself gazing over a futuristic square with waving trees lining either side of it. Silent, as ever.

Then Dr. Flint said, "Now for a few tests, Mr. Marshall."

This time the tests were not entirely confined to the eyes. For an hour or more Ralph found himself taken from chair to chair, felt unseen instruments at work upon him, heard muttered consultations. Then at last Flint spoke out clearly.

"Mr. Marshall, our tests reveal no change whatever in your eyes since the previous examination. Whatever you believe you see cannot be at all connected with your eyes. It is, to be perfectly frank, the outcome of brain pressure from your accident. Delusions, if you will. Once you asked for the truth —now you shall have it. So far as we can tell there is no chance of your eyes ever recovering sight. Further, the strange visions you speak of, together with the queer behavior noted by your friend Mr. Rutter lead us to one definite conclusion . . ."

"You mean you think I'm crazy?" Ralph snapped.

"We believe," Flint said, "that you would certainly be better under observation here until you lose your delusions. We can no doubt soon cure you. It is what your firm would wish."

"Now listen!" Ralph exclaimed earnestly. "You think I'm going insane. I tell you I'm as sane as you are, only my vision's gone haywire. Didn't it ever occur to any of you that a shock might cause the optic nerves to become hypersensitive or something?"

"Are you an optician, Mr. Marshall?" Flint inquired coldly.

"You know I'm not; but I have some scientific knowledge and I know plenty of things can happen to a person after a shock. Take—take lightning, for instance. Haven't you ever heard of people being able to see through solids after being struck by lightning? Is it not possible, then, that I—"

"We don't think so!" Flint broke in curtly. "We are dealing with facts, not fantasies. You require treatment and close supervision, examination by other specialists, in our psychopathic department."

"But look here—"

"You may rest assured we are acting from the best interests," Flint concluded implacably. Then aside, "Attend to it!"

A door slammed.

Ralph swore openly, started to struggle as strong hands took hold of him, obviously those of male nurses. Finally he gave up the battle as useless. His dark glasses were replaced on his nose and he was led out into the corridor. The next thing he knew he was in a room, alone.

He knew after a while that it was well furnished, comfortable enough—but his hands found bars on the windows and the door was securely locked. From rage his emotions changed to deep wonder. Flint must surely know he was *not* insane. Why, then, the captivity?

CHAPTER II

Dr. Brutus Lloyd

ONCE he realized how ruthlessly the medicos had put Ralph Marshall into virtual imprisonment, Ed Rutter's fury knew no bounds. He bitterly regretted ever having mentioned the matter.

He ranted and raved at the callous Dr. Flint, and got nowhere. He tried to make the newspapers take it up, but editors were chary of it. As a last hope Ed recalled the name of Dr. Brutus Lloyd, looked up his address and occupation from the directory. He was

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listed as a research chemist, but his degrees filled two small columns and other remarks spoke of proficiency in the fields of optics, physics, medicine, and criminology.

"In plain words, a dabbler," Ed mused. "Might do worse, though."

So he tracked Dr. Lloyd down to his out-town house—a rather old fashioned place in its own grounds, well free of the city bustle yet connected with the metropolis by a wide main road.

Inside, as a manservant took his card, Ed found evidences of unexpected opulence about the residence. His feet sank into rich carpet; the walls were lined with armory, costly brasses, rare antiques. Clearly Brutus Lloyd was not short of cash by any means.

The manservant came back noiselessly. "If you will step into the laboratory, Mr. Rutter?"

Ed found himself conducted through a door at the end of the hall. He passed into one of the most completely equipped laboratories he had ever seen. The glass roof was fitted with slanted mirrors so that shadowless daylight was cast in every direction. For a while he stood looking round on beakers, retorts, electric engines, switchboards. Of Dr. Lloyd himself there seemed to be no sign—until suddenly a tiny figure came from behind a bench, wiping his hands down his smock.

For a moment Ed stared in surprise. Lloyd was no more than four feet ten inches tall, an amazingly gnomelike man. He was not a dwarf or a freak, simply vest-pocket size. The most surprising thing about him was his head. It was squarish with a brow like a baby cliff, capped on top by a tuft of jet black hair which permitted one lock to curl in a J down the immense forehead. The eyes were small and piercing gray, almost masked by black eyebrows and lashes. The face, though overbalanced by the brow, was powerful for all its smallness. Possibly Lloyd was forty; certainly no less.

"I presume you came for a reason other than to gape, Mr. Rutter?"

Brutus Lloyd's voice was the biggest shock of all. It was deep bass. "I'm —I'm sorry, doctor," Ed hastened to apologize. "I sort of expected to—"

"To find a big man with a white beard dabbling in hellish alchemy?" Lloyd asked, with a babyish smile. "Well you didn't, and I'm not. . . . What's your trouble?"

"I believe you're a criminologist and scientist? Also connected with optics, physics, and medicine?"

"*Dolus versatur in generalibus,*" Lloyd rumbled. "A snare lurks in generalities. . . . Just what concern is it of yours what I do? What are you?—a reporter? If so—out!"

"No—no, wait a minute. I want your help—from the criminal and optical side."

"Really?" Lloyd stroked his forelock for a moment. Then with his sharp little eyes narrowed a little he said slowly, "It will have to be something of surpassing interest to drag me from my research into subatomic cultures. What have you done, my friend? Robbed a bank?"

RATHER uncertain how to take the man Ed said quietly. "It's not me at all. I'm worrying over one Ralph Marshall, a friend of mine. He's in a hospital for supposed lunacy. He mentioned you just before they took him away. But actually he's no more insane than you are."

"I am indebted for the compliment. Ralph Marshall, you say? Not 'Stinker' Marshall who nearly blew me up in the college lab, and who's now working on the Atlantic Shaft?"

"The same—only he isn't working

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day more. This is serious, Dr. Lloyd, really it is . . ." Ed went on to relate the full details. Then he finished earnestly, "You've got influence. You're an expert in optics, medicine, and all the rest. You know more than all those darned sawbones put together. And since you know a thing or two about crime too you might be able to discover if there is a special reason, other than a medical one, for detaining Ralph."

"Frankly, Mr. Rutter, I am not a police officer. My stature is against it. As to Ralph, the situation is little short of preposterous!"

"I thought a true scientist never called anything preposterous! I really believe Ralph *can* see a city or something which we can't. I thought he had a neurosis at first. Now I know differently . . ."

"Hm!" Lloyd flattened his J on his brow again. He stood thinking.

"The firm will back up whatever measures you see fit to take," Ed went on earnestly. "If you can prove to medical satisfaction that Ralph is perfectly sane you will at least get him out of imprisonment. At least you should do so. If you can't, then maybe you can find the right legal means. Ralph has *got* to be released. He's a master engineer, and valuable."

"I suppose you are aware that despite my brilliant reputation I am not at all in favor with the regular doctors, specialists, and patchers of human framework generally?" Lloyd asked calmly. "My methods are unorthodox. At times, surprisingly enough, I have been called mad. My chemical work, leading me to deal in Latin so much, has led me to call many a man worse than a fool in a language he does not understand.

"I may, for instance, know optics inside out, but I am not a registered optician. However, the law entitles you to call in a specialist if you wish—and though not registered I am certainly a specialist. For two reasons—A, my regard for old 'Stinker' Marshall, and—B, my desire to see a proper engineer finish the Atlantic Shaft, I will look into the business. *Experto crede,* my friend—trust one who has had experience."

"Quite." Ed nodded, uncertainly.

"I have another reason—C," Lloyd went on in his rumbling voice. "If Ralph *has* somehow gotten his vision bent into another line of light waves he can be of invaluable assistance to science generally through his revelations. I'll see him.

"First, however, I shall have to prepare. Instruments are needed to try a case like this, and I shall have to bring influence to bear to get permission to make the examination. I'll advise you when I'm ready."

Ed caught the small hand and shook it warmly. "I can't begin to thank you enough for—"

"Then don't waste my time and your own," the little scientist replied briefly. "Good morning!"

IT took a week, overcoming professional prejudice, for Brutus Lloyd to secure permission to examine. It was Ralph Marshall's firm, urged by Ed, who finally ordered it, and against that Flint could do nothing. Ed accompanied the diminutive, Latin-spouting scientist to the hospital in his small but powerful car and helped him to carry in a variety of instruments. There were moments when he felt inclined to smile at Lloyd's Derby hat, long overcoat, and neatly rolled umbrella. He had a remarkable gift for carrying that umbrella on his arm and thereafter apparently forgetting its presence.

Ralph Marshall was finally brought into the wide, light room singled out

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for the examination, and after a few words sat in the high backed chair. Dr. Flint and the summoned specialists, some of them smiling tolerantly, sat in a half circle round the instruments. Only Flint looked impatient, his fingers drumming on his bony knees.

Skipping round like a goblin in his overcoat, hat carefully laid on the surgical table, Lloyd first set up a curious object like a shimmering ball, connected to electrical devices on the tripodical stand beneath it. It started to coruscate with startling radiance when the current was turned on. At times it filled the room with bewildering incandescence, then at others faded rapidly through the spectrum colors into invisibility. The spectators blinked. Flint stared hard.

Lloyd said in his rumbling voice, "Did you see anything then, Ralph?"

"At the moment, sir, I'm looking at some—some sort of ball," Ralph answered slowly. "Solid looking piece of work. It comes and goes."

"Hah!" Lloyd pressed a button with the ferrule of his umbrella. The ball seemed to vanish entirely, but Ralph became excited.

"Now it's quite distinct! It's hovering over the city streets!"

"Such rubbish!" Flint cried, leaping up. "Dr. Lloyd, this is sheer absurdity!"

Lloyd surveyed him, eyelids drooping. "*Ex nihilo nihil fit*—from nothing nothing comes," he observed. "And I haven't finished yet, Flint. Sit down!"

Flint slowly obeyed, his lips a tight line.

"You and your tests!" the little scientist went on sourly; then he pushed his ball instrument to one side and proceeded to get to work with a needle-recording apparatus, shafts of criss-crossing light, and finally a prism device radiating all the colors of the rainbow.

"What did you see, Ralph?" he asked finally, stroking his J.

"I saw a ball, a prism, and something like a torch beam."

"That," Lloyd said, "is exactly what I thought you'd see. You can relax for a moment. Now, gentlemen!" He spun round like a top and pointed his umbrella at the group in sudden accusation. "Gentlemen," he rumbled, "I have pleasure in telling you that Ralph Marshall is *not* mad! On the contrary he is as sane as you are—saner probably. He is also one of the most useful acquisitions to science yet known.'

"Proven, of course, by this — this hardware of yours?" Flint asked sarcastically.

Lloyd was unabashed. His frosty gray eyes were bright with triumph.

"We all know—at least *I* know because I am a scientist of the first order —that the human eye is only capable of seeing within the ranges encompassed between ultra violet and infra red at opposite ends of the spectrum scale. Also there are sixty octaves of light, of which we see only one! Only *one*, gentlemen!" Lloyd raised his umbrella aloft dramatically. "This ball instrument of mine is designed to cover the whole range of invisible light fields. By altering its light-reflecting capacity it gives off either the light waves *we* see, or the light waves beyond our range. In the latter instance it becomes invisible to us—but it becomes visible to Mr. Marshall! In other words, his vision has slipped into an octave higher than our own. So slender a margin, gentlemen—so unusual for it to happen. This is the first real case I have encountered. The other three instruments verified, prismatically, that he is indeed looking into a plane an octave above normal visual range."

"From which," Flint asked with deadly calm, "you deduce what?"

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"I deduce—A, that people move and have their being in this other plane; and that—B, an accident caused Mr. Marshall's vision to be warped into that plane."

Flint snapped, "Then these people are all around us? These—others?"

"Naturally!" Lloyd stood challengingly erect.

"Then in that case," Flint said, smiling maliciously, "you infer that these people occupy the same space as we do? That their city is superimposed over New York? Even you should know that no two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time."

LLOYD'S fingers quivered down his J of hair. Only the slightly higher pitch of his voice revealed his exasperation.

"*Nemo me impune lacessit* — no one affronts me with impunity," he breathed. "Your ignorance surpasses my highest expectations! Any expert physicist will confirm the fact that *our* space is only one of *thousands* of spaces!"*

"Fictional nonsense, Dr. Lloyd." Flint commented sourly. "We are only concerned with facts. In my opinion Mr. Marshall is still completely blind and a victim of mental perturbations. I think I speak for my colleagues, too . . .?" He glanced round sharply and there was a solemn nodding of heads.

"In other words," Lloyd said slowly, "you do not *want* to believe?"

"I didn't say that—"

"But *I do!*" Lloyd bellowed, thumping his umbrella on the floor. "The whole lot of you—you in particular, Flint—are either a collection of conservative, unimaginative boneheads, or else you prefer to believe the dementia theory for your own purposes. Don't interrupt me, Flint! You have the authority here, certainly. What you say goes in this hospital, and you might possibly scare other men into obeying you. But you don't scare me. I am Brutus Lloyd! I cannot legally force you into releasing Marshall—but I can, and will, do other things."

"Such as?" Flint inquired calmly.

Lloyd put his Derby back on his head. "*Cadit quaestio*—discussion is at an end. Let's go, Mr. Rutter. . . . I'll be seeing you again, Ralph."

Lloyd gathered up some of his instruments and departed. Ed looked after him, then back at Flint.

"Listen, doctor, you're not taking Ralph back into imprisonment without plenty of opposition!" he snapped. "I'm warning you—"

"Take it easy, Ed," Ralph himself broke in quietly, rising from the chair. "Causing a scene won't do any good."

"Evidently the patient has more sense than anybody," Flint observed dryly. He stood watching, lips compressed, as the male nurses came forward.

"I'll wait and see what happens," Ralph went on. He shook Ed's hand firmly and Ed concealed the surprise he felt as a hard lump of paper was pressed

* A molecule is made up of empty space in much the same fashion as the universe is mainly empty space. It is not only possible, but probable, that the apparently empty spaces are filled with other matter working at a different pitch of vibration, and therefore completely invisible to us. Matter dovetails and interlocks and each section is at a pitch of vibration which makes it invisible to its immediate neighbor.

Imagine a wire netting for a moment. You would say it is full of holes—but the holes are filled with matter at a different vibration invisible to us, and *because* of such vibration each section believes itself to be alone and isolated. Nature has so designed her so-called empty space that other molecules move about it in the apparent emptiness—hence the belief of Mr. Marshall that he walks through buildings and that people walk through him. What actually happens is that his molecules never touch the other molecules but pass by them, like—like pouring water through the nose of a watering can.—Author.

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in his palm. What could Ralph be up to?

When he left the hospital a few moments later with the rest of the instruments he found Lloyd waiting for him in the car. Slipping in beside him he unfolded the crumpled note and the pair of them read in mounting surprise. It was badly written, since Marshall had been unable to see the writing, but it was decipherable nonetheless:

"Don't endanger anything, Eddy. I've been waiting for a chance to give you this note. I have discovered something almost incredible since this side-slipped vision came upon me. It is to my advantage that you let me stay in my cell for the time being. I have one or two things to look into. I think, but cannot yet be sure, that I have happened on a particularly amazing plot in this 'other world' which affects ours! And unless I am entirely mistaken Dr. Talford Flint is mixed up in it somewhere.

"This possibly accounts for his fanatical desire to keep me under lock and key. Once I'm sure of my ground I'll pass on the news to you. See me visitors' day. If you can find out anything about Flint in the meantime all the better. . . ."

Ed glanced up at Lloyd's thoughtful face.

"Well?" Ed asked briefly.

Lloyd did not reply; he only smiled as he started up the car's engine. But his face was preoccupied as he drove through the busy streets.

RALPH MARSHALL had made no idle observation in his note. His cell—for it was little better than that despite its furnishings—unknown to anybody else, was so placed that in the "other plane" it overlaid a small, compact laboratory, in which a solitary, white-garbed scientist seemed to spend nearly fifteen hours of every day.

Invariably, Marshall saw him arrive as soon as it was light; and he remained until about midnight. In the daytime he seemed to spend his time testing medical apparatus, peering into highly efficient microscopes, making notes, watching queer animalcules slithering and twisting nauseatingly in glass test-tubes.

Certainly Ralph did not like the man's face. It was cast in a ruthless mould. The lips were thin and tight, the jaw hard and cruel. The eyes, too, had the brittle brightness of a man driven by ambition to the exclusion of all finer sentiments. There were times when he seemed pleased to watch a queer, unknown animal—probably the equivalent of our guinea pig—twisting in near-death under the influence of some mystic fluid he had injected into it. Apparently he was working in secret for nobody ever came to see him and he prepared all his own meals.

But above all things it was the notes he made so assiduously that interested Ralph. By walking the length of his cell he was able to look over the scientist's shoulder and read what was being put down. So far, his knowledge of the language was limited, but there were parts of it he understood, and in particular one name which was bound to be the same in any language—Flint.

Was it referring to the chief of this very hospital? That was what Ralph wanted to find out: it was his one reason for submitting so tamely to captivity. What connection had Flint—if it was the same man—with this trap-jawed scientist of another plane of existence, so close, and yet so infinitely far away?

Most puzzling of all to Ralph were the evenings. He would watch the Unknown sit for nearly two hours in a chair, motionless, his head tilted back on two leather pads like those adorning

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a dentist's chair. As he sat, his hand was at work on a neighboring scratch-pad, making all manner of notes, mainly chemical symbols in which Ralph was not in the least versed.

It did not, however, take much deduction to discover that the daytime laboratory work was based on the evening time notes—but why did the Unknown have to sit like that? Ralph cudgeled his brains over it for many days but he got no solution. As a matter of fact, it was Ed Rutter who worked on that particular mystery.

DETERMINED on his own account to more fully confirm Ralph's vague suspicions of Flint, he entered the hospital grounds by night—once Lloyd had discovered by various surreptitious methods exactly what part of the hospital the doctor occupied in his private moments—climbed the railings, and slid softly past the great isolation wards to the doctors' chambers' wing to the east of the hospital. To him it was not a difficult feat to climb to the balcony: his work in the Shaft had made him an adept climber.

He spent some little time discovering which window belonged to Dr. Flint's room, traced it finally from the rough sketch Lloyd had drawn. His hopes were verified when Flint came into the room, switched on the light, and without drawing the shades sat down at his desk to write.

Ed smiled grimly, withdrew from his pocket a tiny, flat microphone which Lloyd had given him. It went easily under the door-size window leading out onto the balcony. The rest of the instrument, perhaps as large as a portable typewriter and strapped to Ed's back, began to record whatever the microphone picked up on wax drums.

Ed switched the button and waited, listening to the small-size earphone. He heard nothing beyond the scratching of a pen so he switched off to conserve the battery power, went into action again when a man came into the room beyond.

He recognized him as one of the doctors who seemed to be Flint's right-hand man. After closing the door and locking it he came over to the desk.

"Not too late, am I?" he asked briefly. "I had that operation to finish on old Saunders."

"No, Dutton." Flint tossed aside his pen. "I haven't started yet . . ."

"How long do you think it will be before we're ready?"

"Depends. Perhaps a week. There's little time to lose now. And besides I want to get everything perfectly arranged before this guy Marshall happens to discover the truth. It's not likely that he will while locked in that cell—but if any fluke law can be brought along to release him he might discover plenty. Only by having freedom could he possibly come across Maravok's laboratory—and even at that only chance could lead him there. Just the same I've warned Maravok that we have a fellow with us whose eyes are geared to his particular space. He told me he was working on a visionary detector by which he'll be instantly warned if alien eyes discover him. Clever man, Maravok . . ." Flint's voice was full of grudging praise.

Outside, Ed stood listening tensely, frowning in wonderment. On his back the silently turning drums were recording every word.

"About this fellow Lloyd," Dutton mused. "He's damnably quiet, isn't he? In face of all he said he'd do? Think he's up to something?"

Flint laughed harshly. "Not him! The man's a clown—the biggest clown in New York City. He thinks he's a detective, a scientist, and God knows

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what all rolled into one. Five feet of empty boasting, my friend, and a lot of phony instruments to back him up . . ."

"Phony enough to prove that Marshall *was* and *is* looking into the plane you contacted," Dutton pointed out uneasily.

"Well—yes," Flint admitted. "Rather a good thing he did find that out for it enabled us to know that Marshall's eyes *are* geared to the plane I've contacted. I suspected it might be so when Rutter called us to have a look at him in the first place. Most amazing case, Dutton. Yet, deeply though it stirs my professional curiosity, I cannot admit the truth of it with so much at stake. He must be kept out of the way, until we're ready anyway. Then it doesn't matter what he does!"

"Suppose Lloyd does manage to find a legal excuse for extracting Marshall. I don't think he's such a mug as he pretends to be."

"That," Flint said, "is a risk we have to take. We've got to stall for time until I have every detail. If the worst comes to the worst we can always arrange an—er—alteration of diet for Mr. Marshall which will make him too ill to be moved. We dare not kill him off: that would involve too searching an inquiry."

In the brief silence which followed Ed controlled a fierce impulse to kick the glass window through, open the door, and dash into the room. He wanted to beat the living daylights out of the callous hospital chief. Only the realization of the necessity for subtlety kept him in check.

Presently Flint spoke again. "Well, time's up!" There was the snap of a watch closing.

Ed peered cautiously through the window as silence dropped. Flint was seated in the armchair, head lying back on the cushion, hands resting lightly on the chair arms. He was gazing into space straight in front of him. Dutton was sitting opposite to him with a notebook and pencil, waiting.

"Now!" Flint exclaimed suddenly; then he started to talk in a quiet, monotonous voice. *"Having thoroughly impregnated the fluid, drop the cultures into it. There will be rapid metabolism. Then—"*

The monologue veered into profoundest technique possible and could only interest a medical expert. But the thought of cultures and fluids, that certain sinister suggestion of a deep medical experiment, remained uncomfortably in Ed's brain. He waited for an hour until Flint had obviously finished, then he withdrew the microphone gently, climbed back over the balcony, and departed. This was definitely getting into deep waters, and only one man could swim in them—Brutus Lloyd.

CHAPTER III

Bacilli—X

THE morning after Ed's activities Dr. Lloyd turned up at the hospital during the usual visiting hours. A nurse creaking with starch led him down the white enameled corridor to Ralph's room and admitted him.

"Ten minutes," she proclaimed curtly, and locked the door behind her as she departed.

Ralph rose at the familiar bass voice, shook the small hand warmly.

"I've discovered something—" he started to say, but the scientist cut him short.

"*You* have discovered something! Ralph, you don't know what a discovery is. Leave that to me! I will admit—A, that your friend Ed Rutter was helpful, and—B, that I might not have thought of the idea otherwise. But my

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genius provided the instruments . . . Listen!"

Lloyd went into a complete recounting of Ed's adventures the previous night, slapping the table with his umbrella for emphasis.

"*Fervet opus*—the work goes on busily," he finished in triumph.

"Seems to me," Ralph said slowly, "that there's only one explanation. This guy who you say is called Maravok, does exactly the same thing as Flint. He sits back and rests his head as Flint apparently does . . . Oh, I forgot. You don't know all the details about the laboratory, I can see. It's like this . . ."

"Telepathy!" Lloyd announced, when the story was over.

"Yes; telepathy. I was going to say that. There is no barrier to thought reaching into this other plane, is there?"

"None whatever. In fact we contact these planes in the normal way. We have all had the feeling of being watched in an empty room, or that 'I have been here before' sensation. I should say a trained telepathist might get into touch with other planes around us. More of us might see these planes if our eyes were as cockeyed as yours. But what is Flint *driving* at?" The umbrella stubbed the floor impatiently. "So far as I can make out from the record Ed made Flint is constantly taking down details of a medical experiment devised by this guy Maravok."

"Just the same as Maravok is taking details from Flint," Ralph puzzled. "It's an exchange of information. See here!" Ralph pulled his scratchpad from his pocket. "You take this and see if you can understand what it's all about. Most of it is in medical terms; stuff I've taken down from looking over Maravok's shoulder. Not very well written, I know, but maybe you can figure out something. His figuring seems to be pretty similar to ours and some of the terms may make sense to you. You know most things in medicine. . . ."

"*All* things in medicine," Lloyd corrected modestly, thrusting the pad in his pocket. "More I see of this the less I like it," he went on. "This fellow Flint is the least angelic person I've ever met. Telepathy, medical experiments, cultures, and so forth, when practised by him spell something sinister. However, maybe I'll find out something from these notes. I'll be back again next visitor's day and tell you how I've got on—also to learn anything you may have found out."

Ralph nodded. The door lock clicked as the nurse returned.

"I forgot to tell you," Lloyd said, as he turned to go. "Ed sent his regards, or his love, or something. . . . He's at work and couldn't make it. Ought to be his own master, like me. Much better! Well—*nil desperandum*. . . ."

LLOYD met no officials as he passed down the corridor, looking like an underpaid clerk. Though there was no law against his presence in the hospital he preferred if possible to avoid a direct contact with Dr. Flint. And he managed it successfully.

Half an hour later he was in his laboratory, perched like a gnome on a toadstool before his desk, poring over the scrawled notes of Ralph, then listening to the playback from the recording drums Ed had made. The more he pondered over them the grimmer his resolute little face became. Certain technical terms leapt readily to his mind, and where they were in a different language the interpretation, from the formula itself, left little doubt as to the actual meaning.

For two hours Brutus Lloyd brooded, stroking his J of hair at intervals. Thus Ed Rutter found him during the dinner hour when he slipped in to inquire as

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to any progress that had been made.

"Anything fresh?" he asked quickly. "You saw Ralph?"

"Sure I saw him . . ." Lloyd slid from his stool and paced the laboratory slowly, hands deep in his smock pockets. Then looking up sharply he said, "I believe we've happened on something unimaginably big! We—or at any rate Ralph—have unearthed a medical plot which for sheer villainy beats anything I ever heard of! So far as I can make out this person Maravok is about as ruthless in his ideas as Flint himself. Both of them are—A, exchanging medical information; B, Flint is telling Maravok how to nurture cholera germs which are apparently unknown in this other space, and against which there is no protection; and—C, in return, Flint is finding out from Maravok how to cultivate a bacilli which will cause paralysis and death when introduced into the human system! It is a bacillus entirely unknown to us, and Flint would be able to start something as virulent as the Black Death!"

Ed's eyes opened wider. "Hell, we *have* found something!"

"*I* have found something," Lloyd averred, his eyelids dropping insolently.

"Well anyway, it's been found. But listen, why should two men telepathically exchange secrets concerning plagues in their respective lands? It isn't even sense. . . ."

"*Corruptio optimi pessima*—the corruption of the best is worst," Lloyd sighed. "Two clever men pawning genius for gross material gains. Look at the situation and what do we find? A—Flint is head of the hospital. B, he is in a fixed position which any qualified medico could take over. C, a Plague hits the country. An unknown, smashing Plague! What then? Suppose he—Flint—were the only man with an antidote? And he *has* an antidote; I'm convinced of that. . . . The demand for his services would be colossal. His antidote, or serum, would net him millions of dollars. He, and whoever else is in on the job—there will be others I'm sure—would reap a fortune. You see? A deadly plan with human lives as the means to an end. Since Flint can probably cure all those who are impregnated he probably considers it is quite a safe move and not a murder risk. It's clever, though I'm loath to admit it. Damned clever!"

"Of course we tell the police?" Ed demanded.

"And tell them Ralph Marshall saw most of this in another plane of space?" Lloyd asked. "You overrate the imagination of the law, my friend. I could explain it to my friend Inspector Branson, but without solid proof even he might become a trifle annoyed. No, I intend to nurture the bacilli for myself first and find out their potentialities. If they turn out as I expect I shall hand the results to the police chemists to satisfy themselves. As for Flint, his recorded voice is enough to convict him. But we must be *sure!* I must also know exactly what his past history has been."

"I'd help you if I could," Ed said, rather anxiously. "As it is I'm tied up during the day, but I could go to the hospital again by night and try to—"

"Emphatically no!" Lloyd slapped his tiny hand on the bench. "You did it once and got away with it; next time you might not be so lucky. Anyway, I have all I need for evidence. If Flint gets wind of our plans it will put Ralph in a spot. Just leave things as they are and rely on me. Now get out. I've work to do."

LLOYD completed his medical experiments during the afternoon. In the evening Ed Rutter found himself gazing through the microscope upon

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twirling, squirming life-forms of minute size drifting through thick fluid.

Lloyd gave a rather harsh laugh. "Bacilli-X," he commented grimly, handling the slide with care as he returned the culture to the glass phial. "There's enough in this tube to reduce the population of New York to paralysis. The devils multiply like hell . . ."

"What's next?" Ed asked briefly.

"Next we track down Flint's history from the medical records. . . ." Lloyd locked the culture phial away in the safe securely, then scrambled into his vast overcoat. He nodded toward the door.

They began with the library and studied Flint's career from *Who's Who*. His career had been distinguished anyway. He had degrees without number, but it was the nature of his various published works that gave an insight as to the real man. In three years he had published *Crime and Medicine, Possibilities of Thought Transference, Telepathy, Mind and Inter-Space, Criminal Action and Reaction,* and *The Psychology of Crime.*

Lloyd, satisfied, headed for the nearest booksellers before they closed and managed to buy every one of the books enumerated. Then he returned home. Without a word, an overlong pipe crackling in his mouth, he settled down to read. Ed started to read too because there was nothing else he could do. But he had no idea of what the diminutive scientist was looking for.

AS a matter of fact Lloyd read for three consecutive nights, probably the days too for all Ed knew to the contrary, before he seemed to arrive at a conclusion. On the third evening, shutting the last of the volumes with characteristic abruptness, he said:

"My conclusions are verified! Flint besides being a brilliant doctor is also a master-telepathist. He either has a mind ideally suited for transmission and reception of thought, or else he has learned the art better than any other man living in this world. Either way he has communicated with this other plane.

"But it is also clear that he has definite leanings towards a criminal state of mind. Like many men with too much scientific and medical knowledge he doesn't know where to stop. Not all of them have that spark of divine genius which makes them invaluable to the world. That is left to the few."

Lloyd licked his lips at the personal reflection and went on. "Though not actually possessing a police record, Flint certainly has been—and still is no doubt—in close contact with many underworld dives. He could not otherwise have written these remarkably clear treatises on the relationship between crime and medicine. He refers to several specialized types of criminals, whom he has obviously met. He gives fictitious names, of course. I fancy it might be possible, however, to track down the various people mentioned in these volumes by way of police department records. Tomorrow I'll see what Inspector Branson has to say about it. I'm ready to move now."

"But what do you hope to gain by tracking down these criminals?" Ed demanded. "It's Flint we want—not the subjects of his treatises."

Lloyd smiled tolerantly. "How do you imagine a Plague would begin, my friend? Do you think Flint would walk about sticking hypos into people? He would have agents scattered everywhere. What better place is there to recruit them than from the ranks of crime with which he is already in contact?"

"Funny! I never thought of that!"

"Quandoque bonus dormitat Rutterus!" Lloyd murmured. "Even the

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worthy Rutter sleeps at times. Fortunately, I remain awake."

INSPECTOR BRANSON was cordial, but doubtful, when Lloyd tackled him in his office at headquarters the following morning. Ed, on a day's vacation to see the thing through, added his own corroboration. Not that Brutus Lloyd needed corroboration: he had it in the voice record and culture phial.

"Have this tested by your chemists and they'll find something they never knew about before which can paralyze the population of New York," Lloyd announced, holding the phial up. "Then have them check the formula by the voice record Ed Rutter here took. That can't damage your infernal red tape surely?"

Branson took the phial and laid it down gingerly. He looked at the little scientist thoughtfully, then finally he nodded.

"All right, Lloyd, I'll do that much. Frankly, though, I never quite know how to take you. You get the most extraordinary scientific ideas sometimes and—"

"And they are always right," Lloyd finished calmly. "This is no exception. However, I am not a detective—in the sense of snooping after criminals, I mean. I am a scientist. That is why I have to enlist your aid in tracing the living originals of the descriptions given in these books by Flint. You'll find them blue-penciled. You can manage that?"

"Don't see why not." Branson flipped the pages. "Take about a couple of hours. Suppose we manage it? What then?"

Lloyd picked up his umbrella. "I'll tell you in a couple of hours. Meantime some lunch is indicated. Let's go, Ed."

They returned at the appointed time to find Branson ready with a pile of record cards.

"Ten of 'em we've easily identified from description and surroundings," he announced. "The rest aren't so easy. These ten are always under police observation, anyway."

"You could rope them in for questioning?" Lloyd inquired.

"Nothing easier."

"Then go to it. You'll find one of them will crack wide open and admit he's in contact with Flint. If one of them does that the rest is easy. You can round up the others in no time—if it's necessary. It's probable that Flint hasn't started circulating his bacilli, yet, and I don't suppose these crooks will know the real issue anyway."

"I hope," Branson said, pressing a button on his desk, "you're all straight about this, Lloyd. After all, basing your original theory on a man who can see into another space is a bit tall, even for you."

"*Ab uno disce omnes,* Branson," Lloyd responded, beaming. "From a single case infer the whole."

"You'd better be right," Branson observed grimly.

Lloyd stroked his J pensively. "I'm sitting right here until those crooks are roped in, if I have to wait a week. Once you're satisfied, Branson, a warrant for Flint's arrest can follow pronto."

CHAPTER IV

Scientist of Another World

RALPH MARSHALL wondered more than once what Ed and Lloyd were doing as the days slipped by. At least he had complete confidence in them, which was everything. For his own part he did not relax his efforts in the slightest: in fact he could not do so

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very well since he was obliged to look into the laboratory of Maravok every time he took his glasses off.

As on the other occasions, Maravok spent each night doing his telepathic work and making notes. During the daytime he made medical experiments and also put the finishing touches to a device like a metronome. On the fourth night he had the "metronome" finished, stood watching it pensively.

Ralph moved across his cell, the better to see what was going on. He stood gazing at the inverted pendulum as it swung rhythmically to and fro—but it struck him as curious that when he moved towards it—actually across his own cell of course — the pendulum ticked all the faster and increased its swinging to nearly double.

A sense of unexpected danger touched him. He saw Maravok's cruel face set in granite lines. He turned sharply, gazed unseeingly at Ralph and then round the laboratory. Ralph backed away instinctively and the metronome resumed its former leisurely beat. He felt—he knew—that that device was somehow geared to register alien vision in the laboratory. In truth it was the device of which Maravok had already spoken telepathically to Flint.

Ralph sat down to watch, clenching and unclenching his fists. He saw Maravok settle in his chair and lie back to concentrate. As he remained motionless various thoughts twirled through Ralph's brain. He knew quite well by this time that the scientist was planning something pretty diabolical from a medical standpoint, something that was no doubt destined to endanger his own people as much as Flint's scheme would endanger the people of the everyday world.

But how was it possible to get at the man from another space? Unless, perhaps, the metronome . . . ? That, so far, was the only thing Ralph had seen which was capable of reacting between planes. Probably it was accomplished by the vibration of bodily aura passing between molecular spaces. That was quite a logical possibility, anyway. If so . . .

Ralph looked at the instrument again. It was not fastened down in any way. The shelf on which it stood was directly over an array of bottles of fragile glass containing all manner of chemicals. Some of them were probably explosive if mixed together. Certainly there were numerous acids.

Ralph began to smile to himself grimly. Perhaps there *was* a way to destroy this other-world laboratory and Maravok with it. Back of Ralph's mind was the remembrance of the alarm clock on the mantelshelf in the living room at home—the thing that had slid itself along by its own vibration every time it had rung. Suppose that the metronome could be made to vibrate strongly enough to slide over the edge of the shelf? It *might*, if he went close enough, and Maravok was sitting with his eyes closed, concentrating.

Ralph rose up and walked across the cell slowly, watching the instrument immediately increase its rate of pendulum swing. Closer—and it still increased. He reached out both his hands and waved them in the space where he imagined the thing must be. That action, as the electricity from his body passed across the gap, made the pendulum become a mist. The instrument, even as he had hoped, began to tremble and slide uneasily along the shelf towards the edge.

AT that moment Maravok opened his eyes and looked up. He catapulted out of his chair, arm outthrust, but he was a shade too late. The metronome slipped into the midst of the glass bot-

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tles below, and in his frantic urgency Maravok missed catching it completely.

Ralph stood watching the results of his handiwork—but he did not watch for long. The acid jars spilled their fuming contents into saline looking chemicals. There was a sudden unholy spurt of flame and deep yellow smoke. Almost instantly it was followed by a blinding flash of incandescent light. No noise, not a sound, but the glare and vibration hurled Ralph back across the cell as though he had been thrown. His eyes twinged and stabbed as though rammed with white-hot needles. He could not see the laboratory any more, only a spotted curtain of chaotic dark.

Gasping with pain, clawing at his eyes, he scrambled to his feet. He had hardly done so before the doorlock clicked and somebody came in.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply, staring into the dark.

"Just me, Mr. Marshall." It was the unmistakable voice of Flint. "I thought perhaps a little chat might be advantageous. You see, I only just learned this evening how completely I have played into your hands. I realize that you know of my telepathic activities with Maravok, whom you killed only a moment or two ago by some method or other . . ."

RALPH stood rigid, his pain abating. He tried to place the position of the voice. It was by the door. He clenched his fists and said nothing.

"Tonight Maravok learned for the first time that there were other eyes watching," Flint went on. "His instrument revealed it. It could only be you. Since you must obviously know most of my plans I cannot imagine anything better than for you to be the first victim of the plague that is about to strike the continent. I have everything ready. My agents will be advised. Right here in my hand is a hypodermic, one injection from which will insure your death within fifteen minutes. Since countless others will be affected within a few hours, and since only I possess the antidote, it will obviously not be a case of murder but death from an unknown disease. Simple, isn't it? Had I known you knew so much I might have done it sooner—"

"Damn you!" Ralph roared suddenly, and charged for where he knew the table was. He seized it, slammed it forward to the position of the doorway, blundered round it. Flint gasped with pain, then his voice came again, thick with fury.

"You can't get out of here, Marshall! Not with those warped eyes of yours! You're as blind as a bat, and I know it! You can't get out, I tell you—"

Ralph clawed suddenly at the door handle, then he stopped at a grip on his arm. Instantly he whirled up his fist into the dark and felt it impact bone. Flint went staggering back across the room, tripped, and dropped his length, the syringe flying out of his hand.

Ralph's sharp ears heard it tinkle on the woodwork round the carpet, and that was enough for him. He plunged forward until he stumbled over Flint. Seizing his neck he raised him, hammered home his right fist time and time again into the doctor's face . . . until a sudden smashing blow in the jaw stopped him for a moment.

He lashed out again, missed, and another blow hit him in the face. It was followed by one over the head which laid him flat on the floor. He felt his senses reeling. A weird miscellany of noises came to him. The sound of running feet, the desperate breathing of Flint and the scratching of his hands as he clawed for the syringe—

Then for Ralph the sounds faded away into silence.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 121)

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"EBBTIDE" Jones and Stan Kendrick decided on a career of peaceful beachcombers of space. But instead they became involved in a weird plot of intrigue against the exiled ruler of Zandonia.

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Whirlpool in Space

By MILES SHELTON

CHAPTER I
Lost: A Space Flivver

THE space liner zoomed off on schedule. Rocket blasts echoed over the reefs, sent a shiver to the dome of the lighthouse, shook Stan Kendrick out of his deep study. He sprang to a window to see a line of white smoke disappear into the morning sky.

"There she goes!" yelled "Ebbtide" Jones from his rocky perch near the water's edge.

Stan glanced down at his beachcomber friend with scorn. "Who cares?"

"I ain't talkin' about the gal," the lackadaisical Ebbtide whined, still gazing at the sky. "I know you don't give a hang about her, specially since she told you you was mossed over. I'm speakin' about the ship."

"She was a fool to sign up for that space hostess job," Stan muttered.

"I still say she's darned good lookin', Ebbtide shouted. "She'd make an awful perty wreck." A dubious look from Stan made him quickly add, "I'm talkin' about the ship. All I know about the gal's what you've told me. I've never saw her."

"You probably never will," Stan retorted. "Space navigation's too perilous. Needlessly so!" He heard Ebbtide cackle, barked at him, "What's

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funny down there?"

"You."

"Why?"

"Cause you know enough about rocketin' to outfly the best of 'em, and yet you stay anchored to your ivory tower with your books and telescopes and weather maps." Ebb cackled again.

"What's funny about that?" Stan demanded.

"Maybe the gal's right, you're mossed over. If you ever once got bit by a spunk fish, you'd tear out and show the space friends how it's done. I'll bet you'd make whipped cream out of the Milky Way."

"Spunk fish!" Stan grunted. "Listen who's talking! Ebb Jones, who never did a thing in his life but sit on a rock and wait for wreckage to blow in. It'd take more than spunk to ever get *you* on a space ship. It'd take twenty stevedores and a hoist!"

SURPRISINGLY, two weeks later Stan Kendrick and Ebbtide Jones took off in a space flivver. No one knew where they went or why. Everyone who knew either of them was amazed. Telecasts and newspapers broadcast the story and the world talked about it. In time the story took a tragic turn.

"NO WORD FROM MYSTERY FLIERS."

Days, weeks passed. Not a hint of them from incoming space liners. Radiograms from Venus, Mars, and more distant spheres brought no word.

The native fishermen and beach combers shook their bewildered heads. " 'Tain't natural," they said. "Watchin' the sea was in Ebb's blood. Wherever he's gone, he'll starve for lack of it. Though most likely he's dead by now."

The excited talk at space ports and in scientific circles gradually waned. Stan's former astronomy professor concluded the young scientist must have gone on a fatal wild goose chase. "He doubtless set out to find proof for one of his original theories, which he concocted by dozens while working at his father's lighthouse, but I fear he was too cocksure for his own good. I predict he'll never return."

At length observers came to the tragic verdict, "Lost in Space," and that was that. Most of the world forgot the incident at once.

But there was a girl who remembered, Susette Udell, a hostess on a space liner. Also a pilot named Kiger. However, neither of these ever shared their private suspicions with anyone.

In the meantime the world turned its attention to the most exciting news of the moment, the overthrow of the African king, Ajo Baustobub, Ruler of Zandonia. The European Powers sliced his kingdom over a conference table, and invited him to flee. He packed his treasure and flew to the United States.

Shortly after his arrival he rebuked the European Powers with a startling decision. Telecasts flashed, newspapers blazed with bold headlines.

"ZANDONIAN MONARCH MAY QUIT EARTH."

"KING AJO BOOKS PASSGE TO VENUS."

It was the first time in history that an ousted monarch broke off relations with the earth.

"ZANDONIAN GEMS TO GO WITH AJO."

The king's treasure was a matter of much comment, for it included the well known Zandonian Gems, one of the rarest collections of precious stones in the world. Protests sounded throughout Europe against Ajo's taking these valuables off the planet; but the United States insisted it was his right, and even offered to send official protection, which the king politely refused. He had his own cortege of Zandonian guardsmen

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which would be quite enough.

The space liner he chartered was manned by a crew with an exceptional reputation for avoiding interplanetary pirates. Commanded by a pilot named Kiger. King Ajo interviewed Kiger and his crew, inspected the ship, and expressed his confidence that the trip would be successful. After meeting the new space hostess, a beautiful girl named Susette Udell, he added that he anticipated a pleasant voyage.

CHAPTER II

Bonanza in the Sky

WHEN Stan and Ebbtide took off from the earth they knew exactly where they were going and had good reason for telling no one. Ebb was so excited—and so airsick—he couldn't eat.

"We're ninety-eight hours out," said the young scientist, watching the dials eagerly. Soon he would either prove or disprove his hunch. "We're starting on our fifth day."

"Fifth day! Then why haven't we had five sunrises?" Ebb had never been off the earth before. "We ain't had but one, and that was when we took off."

Stan laughed. "We're out in the open now, Ebb. The sun doesn't have anything to rise over."

"Gosh, I forgot about that. But when's it goin' to be daylight? This velvety black is like midnight."

"It's daylight now on the sunny side of our flivver. Want to crawl out and see?"

"No, thanks!" the beach comber groaned. "Even if it was bright as day, I'd still be in the dark about everything. All this space looks just alike to me, and yet you claim we're on our way to a beach comber's paradise."

"Right!" said Stan. "And we'll drop anchor before long if there's anything to anchor to. There should at least be a month's accumulation of meteorites and —"

He broke off short, stared at a point of light in the velvety black.

"What's up?" The beach comber hugged the walls as Stan checked the speed. "That star's gettin' brighter, ain't it?

Stan adjusted the telescope. "That's no star. That's our whirlpool!"

Ebb's eyes bulged. "No kiddin'!"

"Take a look through the telescope. What do you see?"

"Looks like a cluster of fruit under a spotlight—turnin' a little."

The scientist's eyes swept the dials, his hands flew over the controls. "What else, Ebb?"

"A few grapes floatin' around free from the main ball of fruit."

"That's it, Ebb, that's it!" He was so excited he could hardly speak. He retarded the ship as fast as he dared. "Take a good look, Ebb. There's a sight no one has ever seen before. That's a gravitational eddy a rare thing, especially this close to solar space routes. We'll drift in as slow as we can." The bright spot grew.

"How do you know no one's seen it before?"

"Because it only formed last month. Three or four more months and it'll go away, but in the meantime it'll draw a lot of driftwood out of space, and if you don't have some pickings I miss my guess."

Ebbtide blinked. In twenty years of beach combing he'd never struck a real bonanza. His mind swam with visions of the valuables so often lost in space. "You mean that everything that gets turned loose in space will wash into this whirlpool?"

"Within a limited radius—yes. This gravitational pocket is due to a tempor-

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ary arrangement of heavenly bodies. I stumbled onto it when I did an original problem for my astronomy class. Look how it's turning! And see how easy those balls bump and jostle around. They'd be heavy on earth, but they must weigh almost nothing out here."

THE naked eye could now detect the clearly etched cluster of meteontes. Ebb's angular body braced against the telescope. Suddenly he emitted a yell that did justice to his deepest instinct.

"Hooray! A wreck!"

Stan gasped. "Are you sure?"

"As plain as day—a space ship—mangled as perty as you could ask for!"

Stan glanced through the telescope. "By George, you're right. Looks like a Venus-Mars mail boat—an old model—wedged in among a clump of meteorites. Good sign. That crate's probably been drifting in space for two or three years."

As the space flivver eased up toward the whirlpool, Ebb jumped about like a hooked eel, for more promising wreckage appeared.

"Talk about pickin's! You're a marvel, Stan, plowin' through all those leagues of space straight for this spot. How in the name of flyin' fish you knew this dizzy ball of rocks would be hangin' out here in the empty sky is more'n I can— Look, Stan, boxes of cargo scattered around! Say, for once we've struck a vein. Let's anchor down and nab the booty before—before someone comes along to nose us out." Ebb chilled a little with the thought.

"Don't worry. No one ever thinks of space combing. Pilots consider that anything tossed off a ship is lost for good— and ordinarily it is. So this is your own little monopoly, Ebb, and it may prove a pretty good thing before the whirlpool dissolves."

The ship nosed through the floating balls of rock and ice that spiralled about the central cluster, and drew in close. The gravitational vortex was not strong enough to put the ship's counter motors to a test. The flivver sputtered around the meteoric cluster, the whole of which was no bigger than a battleship rolled into a ball.

A curious floating junkyard. Scraps of cast-off cargo, fuel containers, heaps of frozen waste jumbled together among rounded rocks of all sizes and tints. Two or three shapeless clumps that might have once been human bodies. Here and there unbroken packages that might contain gold or silver—or possibly soap. Ebbtide's eyes glittered.

"It's all yours, pal," said Stan as they scrapped along the dark side of their little planet, flashing a spotlight. "My only object, you remember, was to prove that this existed and make some astronomical studies of it. The salvaging is yours. We'll hang on for ten weeks if all goes well, and then cart your treasure back to earth. Okey?"

"Okey."

"Good. Shall we tie up and step out?"

The ship came to rest on the bright face of the ball, rotated with it through the dark and back again by the time the men donned their space suits.

"I'm dizzy already," said Ebbtied. "Maybe you'd better go first."

THEY passed through the air locks and Ebbtide felt his clumsy oxygen suit puff out against the vacuum. His scared ejaculation reached Stan through earphones. So did every hard swallow. It was Ebbtide's first taste of the void.

"What are your teeth chattering about?" Stan asked as they decended the ladder.

"Those rocks don't look none too solid."

"Right." Stan reached out to a boulder as big as a barrel. "Light as

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a soap bubble." He gave it a push. It sailed out into space and floated back like a rubber balloon. Ebb was so surprised he let go the ladder and fell.

He never knew whether he fell up or down, but he fell toward the nearest rock, kicking and squirming. One kick against the rock and off he bounded into space a good two hundred feet. He described a hyperbola and floated back, screeching through the radio like a fire siren.

The two men spent an hour of rolling and creeping over their flimsy little sphere, returned to the ship optimistic. There was frozen food among the wreckage. Locomotion was not so perilous as they at first thought. You couldn't fall off without falling back. Best of all, there was plenty of combing to be done, and more expected; and plenty of astronomical data to gather.

"We'll be as snug here as Robinson Crusoe," Stan mused. He wished Susette Udell could see him now.

"It's all too good to be true," Ebb whined. "Someone's sure to come along and horn in on it."

"We won't let them," the scientist declared. "This little baby planet is ours, and I give you the privilege to name it."

So Ebbtide Jones fixed up a sign and Stan helped him plant it. A proud moment it was for the beach comber as he christened the heavenly body "Jones."

The weeks that followed proved so idyllic for both astronomer and salvager that the latter's instinctive trouble hunches came back. "It's too good to last. Are you sure no one knows about this spot but us?"

A tinge of worry showed in Stan Kendrick's strong face. "No. Other astronomers may figure it out, just as I did."

"Don't you say you figured it out for a class? What's to prevent them from rocketin' up here?"

Stan got up from his calculating machine and paced the cabin floor. "Most of them didn't follow through on my calculations. Even the professor got hung up. But I remember there were two persons who caught the point. One was a girl I've mentioned—"

"The one who told you that you was —"

"Yes. The other was a stranger who dropped in to visit the class. I didn't like his looks or the way he took my stuff down in writing—so I stopped without actually mentioning the whirlpool—though he may have got it. Later I learned he was a space pilot named Kiger."

Ebbtide groaned. "We'll have him on our necks sooner or later, I feel it in my bones. These pickin's is too rich to go on undisturbed. Say—guess what floated in this mornin'!"

"What?"

"Three murdered Zandonian soldiers in the flashiest uniforms you ever saw!"

CHAPTER III

Zandonian Gems Adrift

THE handsome King Ajo Baustobub sat in his cabin looking at himself in the mirror. It was not his finely chiselled features nor his clear olive complexion—heritage from the best royal blood of Zandonia and Egypt—that impressed him; rather it was the bloodshot eyes, the pouches of sleepless vigilance beneath them. This voyage was terrifying.

Hourly his perils multiplied. Nine of his twelve guardsmen were gone. Murdered, according to Captain Kiger, during encounters with space pirates.

A knock sounded at his door.

"Who it is?"

"Miss Udell."

He turned the key cautiously. The

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smartly uniformed hostess entered. As always, her beauty sent a thrill through his manly frame.

"With your permission," he said suavely, "I shall lock the door upon us."

"After all that's happened, I certainly don't blame you." The girl crossed to a luxurious chair, glanced about, let her eyes linger upon the three small trunks of glittering jewels which lay open on the floor.

"You're not afraid—being locked in this room with me?" he pursued.

"Why should I be? I'm simply an official on this liner."

"But you are also very beautiful," he persisted.

She smiled. "Your majesty is too well mannered to cause me any fear. Besides, I carry my own keys to every door."

The king raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Yes, of course." His eyes went to the jewels and back to the girl. He twitched uncomfortably.

"Moreover, I carry a gun," she added calmly. "One never knows what may happen on a space trip. You carry a gun too, I presume?"

"Yes, I—" he gestured toward the table where it lay, newly polished.

"Good. The way things are going, you may need it."

"Yes, I—" The king swallowed a lump of fear, inhaled a breath of boldness. He was a handsome figure in his white uniform, gold braided.

"You are in the greatest danger," the girl said quietly. "I hope you arrive at Venus in safety, but you must keep on your guard."

"Yes, I—" Ajo edged toward the table. "I didn't know when I booked passage that the pirates could be so bad."

Susette looked away for an instant, then faced him with the bombshell: "Do you realize that you are the only one left on the ship now—except the crew?"

"But my three guardsmen—?"

"The last three are gone."

The king staggered. For a minute he was stupefied. He tried to speak in a controlled voice. "Murdered, of course, by space pirates—as the others were?"

Susette's lips twisted slightly. "So I was told."

Then anger burst like an explosion. The king's fist came down on the table, he snatched up his revolver, sprang toward the door. Susette barred the way. "Your pardon, Miss," he demanded coldly.

"Wait!" she cried. "What are you going to do?"

"Get to the bottom of this!" The bite of hate was in his words. "Face Captain Kiger! Demand to know who has murdered my men!"

"Then you think—"

"Someone on board has done it! I've kept watch every minute since we disposed of the last three bodies—and there has been no pirate ship. The pirates are on board, I tell you! Maybe Kiger is the pirate! Maybe you—" He cut short as the girl paled. "Anyway I'm going to find out!"

He struggled to tear her terrified body from the door.

"No!" she cried. "Don't go out there in a rage!"

He drew back and gazed at her. It was his policy never to trust a beautiful face, but the girl's alarm went through him. He calmed.

"Were the bodies of my last three heroes saved?"

"Yes," she answered. "They are lying in the corridor near the disposal chute, if you wish to see them."

"Perhaps later. For the present—no. Bring me cigarettes, please. And coffee."

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She went out, through the corridor, through the dining room, to the grill.

KIGER set the ship's controls and gathered his crew of three into conference. They huddled over a breakfast table near the grill, but made no effort to conceal their words from Susette. She listened as she prepared coffee for the ship's only passenger.

"The coast's clear now," Kiger growled. "One more bullet will finish the job and we'll head for Mars, where those gems will bring the best price. Back home we'll chalk 'em up to space pirates."

One of the men nodded. Vietoff, first mate, grunted. "Where's the need to kill the king? Just go in and demand the ice! Four of us to one of him. He'll fork over."

"And then what comes of him?" Brewer asked.

"That's the point!" snapped Kiger. "We better make a clean job of it. It's safer. We could have pushed them all out, and saved our bullets, but we'd always worry about it, knowing that now and then some one gets lifted out of absolute zero and comes back to life."

Macey grumbled, "My guess is, we'll have trouble on our hands from Ajo. He's got a cold eye and a quick hand—and gun play is bad business in a space ship."

Kiger's heavy jaw jutted. "We can fix that." He called "Udell!"

Susette, starting through the doorway with a tray, turned.

"Come here with that coffee," her superior officer barked. "Here's the thing boys." He fished a small black pill from his pocket and dropped it into the cup. "That'll put him under for twenty-four hours. Before he comes to, we'll plug some lead in his belly and dump him. Simple as A B C. Okey, sister, run along with that coffee. And then you'd better roll those last three 'heroes' on the trap. We don't want no tale tellers, living or dead."

"Or male or female!" Brewer added, as the girl went out of hearing.

Macey seized on the point. "It's time we knew where the girl stands, Kiger. She's damned independent, if you ask me."

"You're jittery, Macey," the pilot growled. "She stands with us. She's stood by without a murmur while we put the works on twelve guardsmen. She'll never talk."

"The way to be sure," said Vietoff, "is to give her a cut of the swag."

"Cut, hell" Macey cried. "It's hard enough to cut three chests four ways, let alone five."

"Aw, you make me sick," Kiger snarled.

"Yeah? Maybe you've got a crush on the girl," Macey muttered.

"Maybe I have!" Kiger snapped. For an instant his mind jumped back to a vague impression that bothered him—the impression that he had seen the girl somewhere before she came aboard his ship. He threw off the thought and faced his three men. "Go get some sleep while you've got the chance," he ordered.

Though it revolted her, Susette rolled the bodies onto the automatic disposal trap with dispatch, for now she burned with purpose. She reentered the royal cabin. King Ajo had finished his coffee and was already in a heavy stupor.

"His highness may not appreciate this kindness," she whispered to herself, "but it has to be done."

Then stealthily she locked the chests, rolled them out into the corridor and onto the trap. One by one, they plummeted through the automatic air locks and out into space.

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An hour later Kiger grew restless at the controls, decided he would clean up the grisly business single-handed. He found Ajo dead to the world. He drew a gun and pressed it against the kingly temple, studied the drooping olive eyelids, heavy with sleep. A moment's hesitation. A glance about the room.

Something disconcerted him. That space on the floor. The jewel cases—where were they? Gone!

A chill of terror went through Kiger. He holstered his gun, stormed about the room. Frantic minutes of vain seach—bewilderment—then sullen reflection.

Susette sat in the lounge lost in a book when Kiger strode in and roared at her. "I've just recollected where I saw you, before you were a space hostess!"

"Saw *me?*" Susette reddened.

"*You!* It was in a class I visited. A young fellow named Kendrick worked out a problem, and you were there! You caught it!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the girl stammered.

"Yeah? You were swift enough to catch the problem, and you're swift enough to play your own wits for the gems—"

"But I don't understand—"

"*I* understand!" the heavy jawed pilot snarled. "I know about the gravitational funnel we're in, the same as you do, and I figure I can find the end of it. We change our course this minute!"

He slammed the door and stalked to the control room.

CHAPTER IV

Crisis Comes to "Jones"

EBBTIDE Jones steadied the signboard, "JONES," while Stan Kendrick piled bucket-sized boulders around its base. Every few days (earth time) they had to dig it out and replant it for more meteorids rolled in constantly. The floating rock pile which they called their planet was three times larger than when they came.

Any many times richer! At least, in the beach comber's estimation.

The inpouring wealth kept Ebb so excited he grew thin from forgetting to eat. Every new speck of light that spiralled in from the void met his critical inspection.

Suddenly he dropped the sign and leaped far out into space to bring down something. "Well, I'm a seahoss!" Stan heard him exclaim through the radio, "if it ain't another Zandonian cop! Must be a murder epidemic somewhere out there."

They disposed of the twelfth Zandonian body and took the uniform to Ebb's cache, near the well-hidden space flivver. They pondered glumly. Foul business on the space routes! Pirates! Or possibly an international space chase. The mystery had an ugly look. It troubled Stan; especially when Ebb spoke of the fingernail marks on the wrists of the corpse and said, "There's a gal helpin' with this job!"

Then a week-old newspaper clipping shook out of the uniform and gave them the dazzling story of King Ajo Baustobub, his decision to charter a ship to Venus, take twelve guardsmen and the priceless Zandonian Gems.

Stan grew silent, thoughtful. Ebb kicked himself and bawled like a child. Zandonian Gems at the mercy of pirates! And here he plodded, collecting rocket motors, space guns, pocketbooks, uniforms! Why hadn't he gone in for piracy!

Stan clutched his wrist. Ebb looked up, saw, shrieked, leaped out into space to seize the spiralling trunk, ride it down.

Ten minutes later they sat petrified,

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stared into three trunks of glittering gems. Ebb's eyes bugged out against his space helmet. He had lived all his life for this moment.

Stan shook his head. "We can't take them, Ebb."

"Can't—!!" Ebb gagged like a drowned cat. "But you told me I could have everything! You promised me—"

"I'm sorry, Ebb, but—"

"I'll give you part of it, Stan. I'll split it with you. I was goin' to anyway—"

Stan smiled but remained adamant, even though Ebb's face told him their friendship would shatter. "No, Ebb, it belongs to King Ajo. So far as we know, he's still alive; it's our duty to restore his property to him."

The frustrated Ebb peered into the blackness, desperately praying that the body of King Ajo would come in next. He wouldn't have been surprised, as swiftly as these magic events came.

A silk handkerchief lay in the corner of a jewel chest. Stan wadded it in his hand, stunned to discover it bore the initials, S. U.

"Let's cover these jewels, Ebb," he said. "We're going to have some company, and we'd better watch our step."

THE great space liner nosed into the vortex and crept cautiously several times around the boulder-studded sphere. Spiralling space balls bounced over its nose and rolled off its fins.

Within, the crew pressed their faces against the portholes and grumbled. They had learned Kiger's reason for coming here and they thought him crazy. Recover gems lost in space! Absurd!

"I still think it was the girl that dumped them overboard," said Macey, "even though Ajo claims he did it. I figure he's lyin' to protect her."

"Yeah? Kiger says the king did it."

"He's lyin' too, cause he's got a crush on the girl."

"We shoulda got her out of the way beforehand. I'd bet my helmet the stuff's gone for good."

The ship stopped and the captain faced his crew. "All right, you backbiters, before we go look for those gems, I'm ready to buy out any of you that wants to sell your cut. Who's first?"

The men hushed, reconsidered. Kiger gave orders. 'Baustobub was left securely locked in his cabin. The others donned their space suits, went forth. After much floundering and bouncing out into space, they stumbled upon a path of ropes and scraps of wreckage.

"Someone's been here," Kiger muttered through the radios. "Udell, what do you know about this?"

"No more than you do," the girl answered.

At that moment on the other side of the sphere Stan and Ebb faced each other in surprise. Stan motioned his companion not to speak, scribbled a command to him, "Cut off your transmitter. They're on our wave length."

Edd tried to obey, fumbled, muttered, "How the hell—" before Stan could chop him off. Every word from the party came to their ears. They heard Kiger roar, "Who said that?"

No answer.

"Who said, 'How the hell'?" he repeated. The men looked at each other blankly. "Someone's here!" Kiger snapped. "Follow me close and keep your guns ready. Udell, you walk ahead. You're good protection. Brewer, for God's sake, quit bumping out into space. Can't you tread light and hang on?"

THEY moved to a pole of the sphere where the artificial path ended at a signboard, "JONES." Kiger kicked it

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and it sailed over into the dark.

Sun rays caught the figure of a man in space uniform who approached over the curved horizon. Susette gasped, looked for a sign of recognition, but got none.

"Gentlemen," Stan spoke cooly, "and Miss, I welcome you to the planet of Jones. What can I do—"

"Save your gab!" Kiger thundered. "We didn't come for a tea party. We want the gems."

"Mind your manners!" said Stan sharply. "You're trespassing on private property."

"Cut the stallin'! Your friend here, Miss Udell, knows your game as well as I do. Now you cough up three boxes of jewels—"

"If you're referring to the Zandonian gems," Stan came closer to the row of muzzles, "I have every intention of returning them to the owner."

"Then trot 'em out!" Kiger demanded. "The owner is waiting in my ship." He forced Susette to verify this statement, but Stan ignored her words.

"Let him come and claim them!"

Kiger snorted. "You think Ajo Baustobub would risk his life on this shaky rock pile? He sent us to get them."

"Tell him that won't do!" Stan cracked. "I want to see him in person —and ask him who murdered his guards—and why!"

The gun muzzles quivered.

"All right, boys," Kiger snarled. "We can't waste words on this fellow. He knows too much. We'll find the jewels for ourselves. Let him have it!"

Three guns blazed as Stan fell to cover. Hot rays passed over him. He crowded a cluster of barrel sized boulders toward the gunmen, emptied his own automatic at them through the crevices. Shots went wild, men lost their footing, rolling boulders threw them into a heap.

Stan heard Susette's cry, wondered where she cast her lot and whether her savage superior had captured her, heart and soul. A passing flash through his mind, swift as his muscles. He plunged into the dog pile of men, siezed a gun in time to bat a drawn revolver out of Kiger's hands. Then a shot blew the weapon from his own hands, and a blow across his back felled him.

As he fainted off he knew a muzzle came against his space helmet and a girl screamed.

He did not hear the voice that froze the men in their tracks. Ebb's voice that cried, "I've got the jewels packed in, Stan! Ship's all ready. Where are you?"

Kiger smiled. "That simplifies matters. Let's find that ship." A glance told him Stan was out of the picture. "Get along, Udell, and no more of that screaming."

Ebb's wail continued to pour in their ears. "I'm all set, Stan. Where are you?"

The frightened beach comber followed the path half a circumference before he spied the party toiling in his direction. The sun was on him, he saw the guns come up, ducked to cover as the stream of fire poured past him. Chilled to the marrow, he made for the darkened face of the sphere.

Too late he realized his mistake in opening the flivver's hiding place. The path they followed led to it. He fled over the boulders in torment. What to do? If he could only find Stan—or had they killed him?

Mutterings in his earphones sickened him, told him all was lost. "One's ship's as good as another," came Kiger's voice. "We'll pick up the liner later." The four men dragged the flivver out into the open. "Check up on the jewels!" And soon someone re-

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ported back. "All three chests in the rear cabin."

Ebb crept closer, looked on, dazed. They gave the lithe ship a push out into space, caught the ladders, made for the air locks. In another moment rockets would fire and the thugs would be off with their booty.

Funny the gal didn't try to get aboard. She stood there like a mute statue. But the instant the last man entered, she set up a cry for Stan that chilled Ebb's blood.

Then her words broke. Out of the black horizon the leaping body of Stan caught the sun's gleam. The sphere's rotation was in his favor. Three low jumps brought him near. Pain showed in his movements as he snatched up something and bounded outward. A strange startling sight.

His leap was true. He caught the rear fin of the drifting boat. He battered the rear porthole with a stone. The glass was stubborn.

Kiger saw from within, caught the danger. If that glass went, the flivver's oxygen went with it. Out to the ladder came Kiger. He swung, seized a deadly grip on the perilously perched body, yanked the struggling, weightless form of Stan through the air locks, into the ship.

Susette screamed, grew weak, as she waited for the sight of the rocket explosion. Sickening realization—Stan had fought and lost!

But Stan's frantic effort gave Ebb his cue. He slid out of his cache carrying an object three times his size—a space cannon. A split second before the rockets fired off, the big gun blazed at the flivver's nose, blew the control room to smithereens.

THE great space liner sped toward Venus.

Three chests of jewels rode in the cabin of Ajo Baustobub. A prisoner named Kiger found it was no use to wrench at his irons, grew silent. Three persons in the control room made merry.

"I must tell you, Kendrick," said King Ajo, "that Miss Udell is a different person since the ship is in your hands. I knew she was in love with a handsome scientist, but she did not tell me you were also a dashing daredevil."

"I didn't know it myself," laughed Susette, and Stan smiled as she kissed him.

"But tell me more of this strange Ebbtide," the king urged. "You say he blew up the ship as it charged off, then everything floated back. But why did he not come with us?"

"He preferred to be picked up on our return trip," said Stan, "so he'll have more time for space combing. It's a mania with him. Just now he has three more uniforms to piece together."

A silence followed.

"It must have been very hard for him to give up those gems," the king said thoughtfully. Then his face lightened with inspiration. "By the way, I wonder if . . . After all, he saved the day for all of us."

Ajo scribbled a note of appreciation, signed his name, tucked it under a trunk lid; then rolled the trunk onto the automatic disposal trap and let it drop into space.

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By
DON WILCOX

DR. Retterlic placed a silver plate in Gade Lasher's skull. He knew it would bring agony if the dictator shouted for war. But he couldn't know the operation would be doubly successful...!

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Dictator of Peace

CHAPTER I
The Doctor's Secret

"ARE we going to knuckle down before the demands of nations that would rob us of our heritage?" cried the bombastic little ruler of the Troxian Empire, waving his arms. Beyond the platform stretched a sea of listeners in brilliant green uniforms and bright colored holiday clothes.

"NO!" came the roar of twenty thousand lusty throats.

"Are we going to be kicked, cheated, spat upon by the powers of the world?"

"NO! NO!" the massed soldiers and civilians thundered, en rapport with every word and gesture of their fiery leader.

"Are we going to be bluffed —"

A pistol barked.

The Troxian ruler slapped a hand to his head as he reeled and toppled. Before twenty thousand horrified spectators he went down! Their leader! Shot!

Screams and shrieks cut the air. The terror maddened mob tried to crush forward. The assassin, spotted in the front ranks, cried his last. He crumpled under a bath of lead. As if every green uniform were duty bound to help tear him limb from limb, the angry stampede surged by thousands, rode

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over itself in terrific frenzy.

Voices came through the amplifiers.

"Be calm. Keep your places. The ruler is not dead! He is only stunned —"

Sporadic cheers went up as these words reached out to the panic stricken multitude. The emergency announcers demanded silence. At last, crushed and breathless, the great crowd hushed to listen.

"His head has only been scratched —"

His head! A low tragic groan spread over the sea of people. Then came an official pronouncement:

"Citizens of Troxia. In a few days our leader will address us again from this platform. Now go to your homes, and remain quiet."

The radio newspapers of millions of homes and offices throughout the civilized world blazoned the story.

And what a story! The dreaded Lasher almost assassinated! What reverberations this would have upon a jittery, peace-starved world!

"If the assassin had only been a better shot!" bemoaned an editorial from Timovia, the state which lay in the path of Troxia's conquests.

The same bitter note sounded among other nations. Before the news was an hour old the outside world declared its verdict: a narrow escape from peace!

For Gade Lasher was the most feared man in the world. He knew all the tricks of the earlier dictators of his century. His peaceful gestures were simply strategies of aggression. His appetite for hate drove him on. He was apparently destined to outdo all his predecessors in remaking the map of the world.

Apparently! But how amazed that world would have been, had it looked in upon the ruler's palace that night. Strange forces were at work, reshaping the destinies of nations—the strange forces of four powerful characters who played their game behind the scenes. Even the inner governmental circle of the Troxian Empire were not aware of the personal interplay among these four —dictator, general, doctor, and female secretary. Nor did anyone know that one of these would play a secret scientific trump on this night.

Two hours after the attempted assassination, the propaganda artists proclaimed, at the command of General Blegoff, that Lasher's miraculous deliverance from the bullet proved the protecting hand of God. The churches must hold demonstrations of thanksgiving. Prayer for the leader's quick recovery was in order.

AT LASHER'S palace, however, the activities were less ceremonial. Gade Lasher lay unconscious under the spell of ether, his face very white under his famous coal-black pointed mustache and sharp beard. His personal physician and surgeon, Dr. Retterlic, waited while the best diagnosticians of the Troxian capitol came to an agreement.

It was quickly reached. A clot was forming on the brain. The pressure of the depressed skull must be relieved immediately. A section of the bone must be removed.

Retterlic, by virtue of his position, accepted full responsibility for this plan of action. The operation proceeded under the scrutiny of Troxia's most able scientists. By the time his surgeons removed the clot, Retterlic was ready with a perfectly shaped silver plate to replace the discarded section of bone.

A perfect job. In a few days Lasher's fine black hair would grow back to hide the seams in the scalp. The scientists exchanged congratulations upon the swift and perfect workmanship. New reassurances sounded

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over the empire's radios. The presses rolled out new headlines.

"LASHER REGAINS CONSCIOUSNESS."

"LASHER FEELING FINE."

"LASHER REGIME WILL CONTINUE UNBROKEN."

At midnight Retterlic left his precious charge in competent hands and went off duty. His face showed strain as he emerged from the medical quarters. He scorned the swarming cameramen and reporters who wanted to make a hero of him, and marched directly to the palace dining room. At last a chance to breathe again and reflect upon the bold thing he had done.

He found Doraine at his favorite table. She was always welcome company.

"The man of the hour!" she hailed him with youthful verve. "Shall we drink to the most important event of your career?"

She and the doctor were close friends in spite of their difference in age. She loved his baldish head, his genial fat face, the sharp glitter of his eyes. Moreover, she appreciated his importance. As confidential secretary to the dictator, she was the only person who knew what the doctor meant to the Lasher regime.

"Most important event?" he asked gruffly. "Why do you say so?"

"Haven't you just snatched the world's most powerful man from death?"

"Not for the first time." As Doraine well knew, he referred to an incident of the great war, a score of years previous, when he dragged Gade Lasher out of a shell hole. "First time I daid eyes on him he was more corpse than corporal. I suppose that will always be called my big moment."

"But you couldn't foresee then that he'd become our dictator."

The doctor grunted. "No more than I can foresee now what may come out of this operation."

Doraine studied the furrows in his high forehead. His manner was strange tonight. He was holding back something.

"At least," he continued, "I hope he'll be more moderate when he gets back on his feet."

"Do you have any reason for hoping that?" the girl asked anxiously.

"That's a bad question to ask a tired doctor after a strenuous evening. You never know how things will work out. Do you think I'd have pulled him out of that shell hole and dragged him back to life if I'd known he would live to tear the peace of the world wide open —"

"To the glory of Troxia!" Doraine put in hastily.

"I should have known what a fire eater he'd be even then. When I found him wounded the air was blue from his cursing. He was a volcano of hate from that day. Now he's got to be calmer. These violent speeches are bad for him. I've told him he's got to stop them."

"Is Lasher's welfare your only concern?" Doraine asked bluntly.

"It's my only *official* concern," the doctor snapped.

BUT there was no need to hide his humanitarian motives from her. There was an unspoken understanding. Neither of them cared to see Lasher go on with his brutal conquests. The leader's commanding personality magnetized them; they, like millions of other Troxians, would follow him unquestioningly. And yet Doraine often marveled at the influence of restraint this quiet, strong willed doctor wielded. In these erratic times he was the invisible balance wheel of the inner circle.

Still, his own peace motives were

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Doraine
She loved a Dictator

plain to her.

"Let me warn you," she said quietly, "General Blegoff's appetite for moderators is growing sharper."

"He'll purge me one of these days." The doctor made a neat slice through the air with his hand.

Doraine looked at him in alarm. Memories of recent vacancies in the inner circle were fresh in her mind. "No, I didn't mean that —"

"I mean it," said the doctor calmly. "And he may have good reason. Good night, Doraine."

He rose abruptly and departed for his quarters.

Someone in green uniform waited at the entrance of his suite. Narrow-eyed General Blegoff. The points of his waxed mustache reached out like the antennae of a trouble-hunting insect.

"Come in," said Dr. Retterlic, unlocking the door. The general entered, refused a chair, accepted a cigaret, and came to the point.

"No complaint on the operation proper. . . . But after he came to consciousness, you were somewhat too free with your advice."

"What advice?" The doctor blinked coolly through his spectacles.

Blegoff advanced a step as if his authority was challenged. "You told Lasher to forget his conquests —"

"For awhile. He needs to rest."

"— and lay off his violent speeches —"

"Yes! By all means!"

"You're treading on dangerous ground, Retterlic, dictating to the dictator."

"For his own good —"

"You're being very presumptuous. If you and Lasher weren't such close friends you'd have faced insubordination charges before this. We all know about that famous rescue of yours when Lasher was lost in a shell hole, but some day you'll overplay your hand."

The doctor lit a pipe calmly to quell the tumult that raged within him. Insubordination! Soft words. If Blegoff only knew what a subtle scientific crime went into that operation—but Retterlic bet his life the general would never know.

"Lasher is very high strung," the doctor drawled. "I'm responsible for his health. If he isn't cautious he'll break down."

"A cautious leader is inconsistent with the Troxian ideal. Your advice is destructive. I officially warn you not to repeat this indiscretion in the future."

The general's jutted jaw, square shoulders, crisp gold braided uniform, made him the personification of authority. He tugged his mustache with finality, whirled, and strode out.

Retterlic locked the door after him and snorted. There was one sure bet. The general was suspicious, but his deepest suspicion fell far short of the truth. For the humanitarian doctor had his own stake in world affairs. Be it crime, treachery, treason—the seed of

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restraint was planted, let the purge fall where it may.

His scientific secret. No one would share it—except possibly Doraine. Her silence was golden.

"LASHER GAINS RAPIDLY."

That headline was good for several days to follow. Troxia was stimulated to rejoice, demonstrate, and dream of more conquests. Timovia and other small states prepared for the worst. The green monster would soon move outward again. The world learned that Lasher, eager to make up for lost time, planned to address the hordes of the Troxian capital at an early date.

VISITORS flocked to the palace to inquire whether the little giant who defied assassins was indeed ready for a comeback. They were more than reassured. Lasher's intimate friends declared he was in higher spirits than ever before—a fact which even Dr. Retterlic was at a loss to understand.

Few were privileged to see the reviving leader; none, to read the speech he wrote. Attendants puzzled over his changed demeanor. It must be the rest, thought Retterlic. General Blegoff gave the reporters glowing descriptions. The ruler would undoubtedly launch an even more vigorous military program. The inner circle didn't doubt it. Although Lasher did not commit himself, new purpose burned in his amber eyes.

Doraine grew tense with mounting worries as, day after day, she commanded her office force, relayed confidential messages, absorbed the shock of international pressures.

Lasher being in seclusion, she was the hub of the inner circle—an efficient mechanism. Only when off duty could she reflect upon the bitter seriousness of it all. Then she saw life as a rocket ride through uncharted perils. Every

Gade Lasher
The world's peace was in his hands

new move brought danger of a crash. Demonstrations of power, urges, intimidations of minorities, bloodless conquests, diplomatic thievery! How helpless she was within it all.

The mighty little man with the severe black mustache and beard often gave her a word of praise; sometimes after hours of tension he seemed to crave her conversation. But the doctor was right, his record proved him a volcano of hate. She could not hope to understand his chaotic nature.

She shared confidences with no one except the baldish doctor. Tonight at their secluded table in the dining hall she poured out her fears. Retterlic listened and ate.

"I can't understand what he's about," she concluded. "He's on fire with power as never before. I'm afraid he'll never stop until he brings the whole mad world down on us."

The doctor was deliberate about responding. His manner had been reserved since the night of the operation. He searched her eyes. "You hate to see him drench the world in blood, don't you? . . . You even feel a personal

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fondness for him."

Doraine was on the defensive. "He's the ruler of Troxia. It's my duty to respect him."

"But you are fond of him," the doctor persisted.

The girl faced the challenge honestly. "Of course. I'm thrilled—stimulated—by the very sight of him. I'm swept off my feet by his masterful personality. But who isn't? That's what has happened to all of Troxia. We've been overwhelmed by a powerful actor!"

"Actor—yes," the doctor groaned. "And to think, as a boy he was a stage hand who *wanted* to act—and they wouldn't give him a chance! Now the world's his stage, and he takes its hatred for applause."

A waiter came and went, leaving silence in his wake. Retterlic studied the girl's troubled face. Now was the time to tell her.

"I've something to confide, Doraine."

"I've been waiting," she answered quietly, "and I know it must be something very serious."

"Yes." The doctor sought his pipe and lit it. "Lasher is politically dead. That is, I've deliberately thrown a fatal wrench in his machinery."

"How could that be possible?"

"By a scientific trick. It came to me just before we operated. I acted on impulse. By the time the other surgeons removed the clot I was ready."

Terror came into the girl's face.

"Don't be frightened," said Retterlic. "If Lasher obeys my orders and keeps his voice down when he speaks—"

"But he *can't* do that! Whenever the crowds cheer him he has to come back in that awful rousing vioce—"

"And they thrill to that voice. That's why they share his hatreds. The vicious circle! The key to Troxia's madness!" The doctor shook his head bitterly. "But from now on, Gade Lasher will avoid that rabble-rousing tone."

"And if he doesn't—?"

"He'll get a shattering headache too painful to endue. That plate I put in his skull was more than just a slab of silver. It's a delicate instrument made to resound to the shrill pitch of his rabble-rousing voice. I turned it to a phonograph record of one of his speech. When that vibrates in his skull —"

The doctor cut short. Loud speakers boomed through the dining hall.

"Official announcement! Next Friday at two o'clock Gade Lasher will speak to the citizens of Troxia form the Capitol Park. His message will be broadcast to the world."

CHAPTER II

Lasher, the Mystery Man

THE world held its breath, waited for Friday. Every statesman speculated; so did every professor, barber, soldier, office boy. Words rolled from the presses by millions to explain what Gade Lasher would probably do.

Was he determined to march his green army straight across Timovia? If so, he would come face-to-face with a stubborn barrier of world powers. Unfriendly ones. Was he set to fight the world? Thousands of questions were involved. The world dared think only in questions. For Gade Lasher revealed nothing.

As one sharp international correspondent observed, "All our predictious may be idle. Gade Lasher is a mystery man. He has said so little since the bullet ridged his head that no one knows what is is planning. He has isolated himself from everyone, even his own inner circle. His few statements since his operation boil down to: 'I feel better every day . . . I'm a new man

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. . . I regret this waste of time . . . My course is clear . . . I shall speak to the world on Friday . . . I have much to do . . .'

"These statements may mean that Lasher is ready to set off the powder keg. Or they may mean something else. We shall know soon. In the meantime only one thing is certain: the world expects trouble from Lasher and he knows it."

Thoughtful people cocked an ear to this critical note. Perhaps Lasher was a mystery man. But the masses in all nations believed just one thing: the Troxian dictator would set off the powder keg on Friday.

Troxia became a pandemonium of patriotism. The Troxian ideals! Conquest! War! Everyone seemed to take up the cry. Skeptics hushed, wise men held their tongues, heartsick wives and mothers did their weeping in private.

Tons of letters poured to the palace urging Lasher on. Generals itched for action, promotions. One nod from their leader and they would hurl their green-clad thousands at the world. Clergymen pledged their prayers, school children volunteered to take over the factory work, some women asked the right to bear arms.

Gade Lasher's burning amber eyes widened with wonderment. He did not read the carloads of mail, but his offices prepared daily charts so he saw at a glance how the nation's war sentiments rose. He bit his lips.

What had he done to cause this rising tide of war madness? Since his operation—*nothing*, except to announce an important speech. This spontaneous rally to conflict was the product of forces he had set into motion months in the past. Forces that would sweep him and Troxia into an international debacle.

Strange to say, he sickened at the thought. As if a germ of new conscience sought life within him. As if he valued peace. As if the currents of greed and strife and brutality he had generated in the past now horrified him.

Who was he, to have this monstrous bloodthirsty war machine on his hands? Gade Lasher, the dictator of Troxia. The most feared man in the world. The tyrant who purged on impulse. The ruler who hungered for territory, riches, power. The leader who hypnotized the masses of followers with his own lust for hatred. He was Gade Lasher.

And yet he was no longer *that* Gade Lasher. Something had transformed him.

He knew what it was—knew it soon after his operation—and he marvelled that such a change could happen.

No one else knew. Even Retterlic did not suspect. But Gade Lasher knew that when the doctor removed that section of skull he not only cared for the present wound. Unwittingly he also relieved an old pressure on the brain—a souvenir from an encounter in the great war. After nineteen years the pressure was gone. Strangely, Lasher was a new man. He was suddenly freed from his appetite for hate.

The world was a different color and he surveyed it in amazement. A few weeks ago it had been a plaything to satiate his paranoid cravings. Now it was a world of bombs waiting for him to touch the fuse. Every instrument of war he had set in motion came like a boomerang at his sanity.

In a wheeled chair he moved through his private chambers and offices. Every official document, every signed order, every blood stained purge list, every glaring map studded with colored pins mocked him. A mad world on his hands!

What could he do? Think! Plan! Act! Use the awful power at his com-

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mand to undo the evil works he had wrought. Confront the millions who had followed him into this mire. Challenge them to turn with him, about face! Back over the hard, blood drenched trail to a saner world. A world of peace and good will. That was his only ideal now.

Would they follow him?

That question tore at his vitals. Sleepless hours could not answer it. Only one answer came. Go to them, transformed! Face them! *Speak* to them!

THE days required to regain his strength seemed endless to Lasher. But he came back rapidly. This blazing new vision generated vitality within him. He must not bleed his energies with futile remorse. He would need power as never before if he was to repay his terrible debt to civilization.

It was a frightening thing to undertake. No great leader had ever, to his knowledge, survived a drastic change of decisions. To commanders of men, reversals are suicide.

But there was one trick upon which Gade Lasher fastened his hopes—one bright promise through all his black hours of torment—one ability that never failed him: his gift of oratory. The emotional ring of his vibrant voice always carried his listeners. It had never let him down. Now it was his one chance to turn the tide. On Friday he would speak.

Doraine was startled to observe the dictator's demeanor. Ordinarily he gloated in manifestations of Troxian patriotism. Now he seemed to grow feverish as the rising pressures of his people focused upon him. He was an enigma. What strange fires burned within him? She wondered.

He paced the floors incessantly, a growing torrent of power. Dr. Retterlic could not make him rest. He felt too strong. He'd already rested too much. Stupid waste of time. Too much to do.

Retterlic urged to no avail. As the date of the speech drew near, his restraining influence melted away. It was idle for him to warn against using an emotional voice.

"Keep my emotions down!" the dictator cracked savagely. "I need my emotions as never before. Tomorrow when I speak my voice will shake the very foundations of hell!"

The doctor shook his head and turned to go. "Do you ever rehearse your speeches aloud?" he asked.

"Never."

The doctor looked grave as he emerged from the dictator's reception room. Doraine shuddered to read his eyes. He did not stop to talk with her.

She counted the hours until the approaching calamity. Nothing could stop it now. With every glimpse of Lasher, every sound of his voice over the wires or through the door she quailed. To think of the awful instrument he carried in his head. There it hid, like a death trap, waiting to spring.

Suddenly Doraine felt a wild desire to tell him. Betray the doctor. Save Gade Lasher from the unspeakable humiliation that tomorrow was sure to bring—

GENERAL Blegoff was before her, beating a fist on her desk, demanding attention.

"I must see Lasher!" It was the demand of Troxia's greatest general, the man in charge of the armed forces and the secret police.

"I'm sorry, General Blegoff, but our leader positively refuses—"

"I won't be put off any longer." He bit his words angrily. "Not one member of the military staff has conferred

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with him for days. It's time he told us his plans. How can the armed forces prepare to strike if he keeps us in the dark?"

"Perhaps he doesn't plan to strike, or he would have told you."

"Then why doesn't he—" the angry general broke off as a new bolt struck him. "Yes, perhaps he doesn't—" His fingers sought the ends of his waxed mustache.

"I'll tell him you inquired," said Doraine conclusively.

"By the way," Blegoff spoke in an oily voice, "How much times does our illustrious doctor spend with Lasher?"

"He makes only his regular calls."

"Regular calls, eh!" The general's thin lips drew back in a jealous smirk. "Nice privilege, with everyone else shut out. Him with his moderation talk. Just the chance he wants—"

"General Blegoff, you've no reason to—"

"I've plenty of reason! It's my business to be suspicious of everyone. Lasher expects me to arrest and purge as I see fit. As head of the secret police it's my duty. I'm the most responsible man Lasher's got!" He beat his fist on the desk like a rivet gun. "And yet I can't go in to see him. That damned doctor with his poison peace talk goes in every day. All I get is a closed door!"

"But General Blegoff—"

The big man was red with fury. He towered straight in his green uniform, looked to the door.

"I'm going in. Now!"

"But the dictator is seeing on one!" Doraine cried defiantly, her back and her palms against the door.

"He can tell me that to my face!" Blegoff snarled. With a quick forward step he caught the girl by the wrist and flung her to the floor, swung the door open, looked into the burning amber eyes of Gade Lasher.

He stepped back in surprise. Another step as a swift Lasher hand slapped him across the cheek.

The dictator helped the girl to her feet, then turned his glare back upon his chief of military forces. Blegoff paled; the marks of the slap stood out blood red. He saluted and tried to mumble an explanation.

The black bearded little dictator returned the salute, cut his words short. "When I want to see you, General Blegoff, my confidential secretary will let you know. Good day."

The husky general marched out, crimson returning to his face.

Doraine murmured her thanks to Gade Lasher. The powerful little figure bowed slightly and returned to seclusion. She gazed after him, trembled with emotion that was not altogether fear, dreaded the morrow that promised to crush him.

FRIDAY noon—a chill went over the civilized world. Nations waited like animals crouched in corners. Many a president and premier felt a sickness in the pit of the stomach. Radio announcers charged the air with ominous words. Telecasts sent forth the vivid picture: hundreds of thousands of Troxians massed at Capitol Park, uniforms gleaming, banners flying, hearts pounding.

Friday noon. The parade of state officials set forth from the palace, a train of green and gold splendor. Military bands played, troops marched, war machines rattled, silk flags flamed in the sun.

Doraine watched from her office window until the cheering crowds marched out of sight. She thought only of Gade Lasher. The doctor was right after all; this war madness must stop. The dictator would not listen to Retterlic's plea

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for moderation; then let him go ahead and trap himself with his own violence. The girl held back angry tears that came with these thoughts.

She went back to her desk. Two envelopes caught her eye. The small one was a note from a friend in one of the other offices. The friend had enclosed an order rescued from a wastebasket. Addressed to a corporal of the secret police, it read:

"Escort Retterlic to Capitol Park and stay with him. I have reason to believe he has wielded a malicious influence over our leader. If Lasher's speech proves this judgment correct, take care of the doctor at once. Signed, Blegoff."

Doraine's white, quivering hand reached for the other envelope. It was addressed to her in the familiar handwriting of Gade Lasher. It contained a manuscript—his speech; also a note to her:

"Doraine: Please make copies for the press as usual, and release when I have finished delivering.

"You may be surprised at the nonmilitant tone of this speech. Confidentially, an amazing change has come over me Retterlic dosen't know what wonders his operation worked. I now recognize that my past leadership has been madness. My one burning desire is to restore peace to the world. I know the odds are against me, but I have one potent weapon—my voice. So wish me luck today.

"I tell you these things as a friend. If I fail in my one great motive, you, at least, will understand that I have tried to undo my wrongs. Affectionately, Gade Lasher."

Everything went cold for Doraine. She buried her face in her chill hands. For the present her wits were paralyzed. She was only aware that the world about her was crashing to bits. No one could catch it now.

Vaguely she heard the radio announcer say that Gade Lasher was about to speak.

CHAPTER III

Madness Reigns in Troxia

THE black bearded little ruler of the Troxian Empire advanced to the microphones. The crowd roared—a long, deafening ovation to their hero returned from the shadow of death. Lasher saluted in response to tens of thousands of saluting arms.

"My people of Troxia—" his calm voice carried out over the sea of humans, and again they broke loose in thunderous cheer. At last they silenced, ready for him to open fire. The air grew tense with expectation.

They knew the pattern of his former speeches, which always fed their hungers. He would inflame them from the outset by ranting upon the bitter grievances they suffered from the outside world, then challenge them to demand their rights even if war was the cost, and finally close with a passionate plea that the other nations meet these demands to save the peace of the world. This was the speech the Troxian people and the fear-struck world expected. They listened, breathless.

Lasher's first words came forth in a surprisingly mild, genial voice. He thanked the people for this immense reception and expressed pleasure at returning to them whole and sound.

He assured them that his health was never better, his will to meet their needs never stronger. A stout applause. The multitude caught up his rising magnetism.

Suddenly his voice gathered volume, his arms slashed the air, he plunged into the fire of his message.

"My people of Troxia, nations of the

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world, I come to you today to decry the sinister forces that threaten to plunge civilization into an unprecedented cataclysm of blood. I have seen those forces grow from a trickling spring of hatred into a rushing torrent of death and destruction. But it is not too late to dam the flood. People of Troxia, nations of the world, I come to you today in the name of PEACE!"

His voice lifted. The final word shot forth in such a shrill, penetrating tone that the vast multitude trembled.

The dramatic Lasher stopped short, seized his head. A sharp pain vibrated through his skull. The spectators saw, gasped. Perhaps another assassin's bullet had—

No, it was only a chance gesture, for the leader hurled a fist and cried the key word again.

"PEACE! !"

Again he clutched his head. His face twisted in pain. The sea of spectators murmured. Their massed voices rolled out over the world's radios in a low, troubled roar.

"PEACE! ! !"

That soul shaking voice again—and with it, the face of torture. Both hands to the head. The body swayed, then stiffened with determination.

"PEACE! ! !"

Officials on the platform jumped to their feet, started toward their stricken leader. The crowds surged with alarm.

"TROXIA! ! !" Gade Lasher cried. "TROX—"

He went down in a white faint, his steel fingers gripping his head. Uniformed men swarmed over him, shouted, struggled to loosen his clothing, called for Dr. Retterlic.

DISORDER turned to pandemonium. The raging crowd pressed in all directions. Radio and television riveted the civilized world in a grip of excitement.

An announcer barked, "Dr. Retterlic! Dr. Retterlic! Where are you? Gade Lasher is calling for you! Dr. Retter—"

Another voice switched in.

"Ladies and gentlement, a tragic thing has happened. No one knows as yet just how or why, but Gade Lasher apparently became desperately ill while in the midst of his speech and fainted away . . .

"He is now being carried to an ambulance. His eyes are open, but he looks to be a very sick man . . . Several doctors are with him; however, he is still calling for his personal physician, Dr. Retterlic, who cannot be located at the moment. He is writhing in pain, clutching his head as if he has a terrific headache . . .

"Some state officials and doctors are getting into the ambulance with him . . . They will drive back to the palace at once.

"I gather, from the rapid fire talk, that our leader must have suffered a relapse from his brain operation of a few weeks ago following an attempted assassination, but we will have more definite information for you as soon as Dr. Retterlic is found. There seems to be some mystery surrounding Retterlic's sudden absence . . .

"The sirens you hear are the motored police breaking a path for the ambulance, and now they are speeding away from us, back toward the palace . . . "

The storm center quickly transferred from the park to the palace. An hour of nervous, clamorous waiting outside the medical quarters. Then sud denly the doors swung open and the doctors emerged in a body.

News correspondents, officials, radio casters pounced at them, buried them under an avalanche of questions.

Is he alive? What's wrong? Where

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is he? What happened? Give us the facts. Is he conscious? What does he say?

Before a single doctor breathed an answer, the phalanx of questioners stopped short, brought up their arms in salute. The dictator himself strode into their presence. His personal guards accompanied him, nervously alert, dizzy from their master's unaccountable behavior, powerless to restrain him.

GADE Lasher was neither dizzy nor ill. His dramatic little figure electrified the room. His eyes flashed, his bearded chin thrust forward.

"You want to know how I am," he snapped. "I'm perfectly well. I haven't been shot or stabbed or poisoned. I'm sound and I'm sane."

A cold hush held the room. No one spoke, but every countenance asked: What happened?

"You wonder why I fell during my speech." His tone moderated. "I can only answer that a violent pain suddenly cut through my skull. I tried to ignore it. It came sharper and I fainted. A few minutes later it passed. There's nothing left of it now. Probably gone for good. The whole matter is of no consequence."

The listeners stood petrified with curiosity. Lasher continued:

"Why did it come? That, I can't answer. Neither can these doctors." He laughed lightly. "They've buzzed around me like a swarm of bees and they can't find a symptom of anything. Most of them witnessed the operation on my brain and they know it was a perfect job. So that's out of the question."

His voice grew sharper. "Unfortunately my personal physician is still missing. The secret police fear he has met with foul play. When they find him, I'll undergo further examination. In the meantime, have no worries."

The crowd rustled uneasily. Pencils poised over notebooks. Cameras flashed.

"And now you wonder what to tell the public about my unfinished speech." The message imprisoned in Gade Lasher's brain was like an explosive whose fuse had been cut. His voice gathered emotion with every word. "Tell them I'll come back tomorrow and give them a speech they'll never forget."

One of the doctors started to raise a warning hand. Lasher's eyes snapped, his head tossed with confidence. "Tomorrow they shall hear! They *must* hear!" He shouted with fervor. "The world must know my plans for PEACE! ! ! "

Down went Gade Lasher! As if that final word set off a bolt of lightning in the war lord's brain. He looked up, stung with more than pain, humiliated, shaken by a dread something he couldn't understand.

The doctors helped him up from the floor and ushered him away. The people walked out shaking their heads sadly. The only person left in the room was a girl, whose eyes glistened with tears.

Doraine cried because she wanted to tell her master the awful secret that burned in her heart. She couldn't. Not only because of her promise to Retterlic. There was Lasher's faith in Retterlic. She could not think of exposing the doctor as a traitor, knowing how the dictator valued that friendship. Gade Lasher would go to pieces before her very eyes—the thought sickened her—but he must never know.

She burst into tears afresh as she thought of Retterlic's dilemma. At this moment he was on his way to his doom —a dungeon or perhaps death. A word from her might save him—but what

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tragedy would follow! Lasher would probe him regarding head pains. Sooner or later the truth would out! And then —who knows where the knife of the purge might fall?

And if the dictator should have another operation, he might emerge the demon of hate once more. No, Doraine's lips were sealed. She must avoid conferences with Lasher for fear her sentiments break her silence.

GADE Lasher made no more speeches that week, nor the next, nor the next. He cancelled all public appearances, press interviews, conferences with the inner circle. But he did not hide himself away completely. He strode through the executive offices of the palace like a walking bomb that might explode without warning. Secretaries could feel the tension the instant he entered a room.

No one who saw him could think him ill. On the contrary, he bristled with energy and purpose. What purpose, no one could guess. He went from desk to desk, examined official documents, orders that bore his signature. He carried a cancellation stamp and used it freely to veto former arrangements. He removed the colored pins from the maps of projected campaigns.

His actions were swift and decisive, hardly the rash, desperate movements of a mad man. But he was plainly under terrific strain. He spoke only in the thick, restrained voice of one in great conflict.

He pressed the police to find Retterlic, without effect.

The Troxian propagandists were embarrassed, along with editorialists, military officials, and a host of others, to explain and justify the mystery man before a bewildered public. Since Lasher made no statement, they were forced to make what they could of his unfinished speech. After, much squirming, they centered upon a suitable interpretation.

"We know Gade Lasher too well to be disappointed by his opening cry for peace. Had he been able to finish his speech, he would of course have told *how* our armed forces must achieve that peace. Timovia stands as a barrier to our progress. As soon as our leader sees fit, we shall move forward."

The spokesmen of outside nations came to practically the same conclusion, only their version was, "We know Gade Lasher too well to be *fooled* by his opening cry for peace —"

The ruler of Troxia sat in his private study, alone. His fingers pushed over his white forehead and through his fine black hair. His amber eyes looked up, glared at themselves in a mirror across the room, studied the coal black mustache and sharp pointed beard, saw lines of hateful scorn about the lips, the lust for death in the flaring nostrils. That was the Gade Lasher the world knew. The most obeyed, most feared, most despised man alive.

And now he hated himself, hated every word he had spoken, every deed he had done for the past nineteen years. He had loosed his flood of hate upon civilization. He would drown in that flood. Though he glimpsed the light of peace and craved with all his being to bear that torch, it was surely too late. Every hour brought greater pressures upon him from those poor, blind, dogged Troxians he had taught to hunger for the shabby glories of war.

If he could only cry out against it all! Cry out with his vibrant voice until he went down under the fire of his enraged, betrayed followers! Cry out for *peace!*

But now the very word chilled him. He dare not cry his feelings. Even his voice, his unfailing weapon, turned on

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him, stabbed him with unbearable pains.

Bitter irony, to writhe with power and burn with a zeal to save the world from catastrophe, and yet be bound to himself! He could not endure it! He would go mad—

He turned away from the mirror, listened. D r u m s, marching feet sounded up from the streets. More soldiers arriving for his inspection before they departed for the border of Timovia.

CHAPTER IV

A Ruler Against Himself

THE rhythmic thud came closer, echoed up through the spacious open hallways of the palace. Gade Lasher froze. His habits revolted. Body and will refused to function. Every ounce of his being rebelled against duty.

Troops ready for the Timovian border! Yet he, the master of Troxia, could not make himself march down to review them! A ruler divided against himself! God, what a numbness!

The telephone buzzed. That was someone calling to tell him the regiments waited, ready for inspection. He could not move. He was paralyzed as in a nightmare. Perhaps this was hysteria—the beginning of the end—the brink of collapse? For days he had dodged crises, avoided contacts with the inner circle, postponed his conference with Blegoff, refused to answer notes from foreign powers.

And now this tiny thing caught him cold, tipped the scales of inner rebellion. A review of troops! Absurd! Ordinarily he took such matters in his stride. That was the old Lasher. He gloated to parade before his armies, to watch them catch fire from his torch of hate.

Breaking out of his freeze, he forced himself to the telephone. He would take refuge in a subterfuge. He must maintain a front.

"Officer? . . March y o u r troops through the left wing of the palace, past the giant television mirror. I shall review them from where I am, by television."

"Very well, your honor."

As soon as the images of marching men began to cross the rectangular televisor in his study, the feverish Lasher signed an okay and cut the switch. He paced, tore at the tails of his black lounging coat, threw his head of fine black hair this way and that. He was a trapped mad man. This psychological torture could not go on. If only he could speak —! If only Dr. Retterlic could be found! Perhaps Retterlic could stop the pains. But that would not check his madness. How could he hope to weld peace out of the flames of war? That conflict had no answer—none except mental collapse—the tragic answer that nature held before him so temptingly at this very moment.

"If I could only talk with someone —" His thoughts shot out on erratic tangents. "D o r i n e . . . lovely . . . Damned Blegoff! Retterlic wouldn't desert . . . Someone murdered him. . . . I can't shout . . . can't cry . . . Wild pains. . . . Yet *I* am the Troxian ideal . . . the world's bad boy. . . . Those last purges cut too deep. . . . Rogler and Ance were a bloody mess. . . . I was acting . . . acting for the world. . . . How soon will the powers close in? . . . I'm wasting time. . . . But it's too late for peace. . . . They'll never believe I've changed. . . . My very face. . . . That mirror is too searching. . . . If I shaved them off. . . . But Doraine. . . . She'd never believe there could be love in my heart. . . . If I shave them off. . . . A new

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man? . . . But what? . . . Escape in a plane? . . . Some desert isle? . . . Burn out with remorse . . . with the world in flames? . . . Must get a grip on myself. . . . Peace! . . . Cry for it. . . . Let the pain kill me. . . . Damned telephones. . . . Blegoff. . . . He's waiting. . . . Face him! He doesn't know I've turned. . . . He wouldn't dare. . . . Cow him! . . . Then prepare . . . Tell Doraine. . . . Give her a code. Shave them off . . . go . . . take a chance on the fates. . . . Now, pull myself together!"

He snatched up the telephone.

"Doraine, I've got to talk with you. . . . Yes, I remembered that I ordered Blegoff to come for an interview. . . . Very well, send him in."

THE two men faced each other, charged the room with the electric clash of sensitive nerves.

"General Blegoff," the dictator spoke in a brittle voice, "I can't understand why your secret police fail to find any trace of Dr. Retterlic. Is this particular disappearance beyond their powers?"

The black coated little ruler moved dramatically across the lush carpeted floor, held his penetrating amber eyes on the general. Blegoff's handsome uniformed figure stood solidly; his face betrayed no emotion as he spoke.

"I'm not surprised at your concern, your honor. I realize the doctor was indispensable to your physical welfare."

Lasher caught the implication—a jibe at his unfinished speech—but revealed no anger.

"More than that, Blegoff," he said with intense sincerity, "he is a friend."

"And a counsellor," the general added. His tone carried jealousy and accusation.

"You're jumping at conclusions, Blegoff," Lasher snapped. "I want your secret police to find Retterlic, whether he's living or dead. Do you understand?"

The general hesitated, his face warmed. He played for an offense as the best defence. "These are very trying times for the secret police, your honor, especially since you cancelled some of our powers for swift executions. You realize —" A sharp flash of amber eyes told the general to be careful how he spoke. But he was desperate. "Unfortunately, some misinterpretations of your speech have started an ugly wave of peace agitators —"

"Blegoff!"

The general made a perfunctory salute. "My apologies if the reminder is painful. Possibly my anxiety for the Troxian ideal has overworked my nerves." He met Lasher's glare. "Now that all the unfriendly powers are packing troops on the farther boundaries of Timovia, and we have passed up our original date to strike, perhaps my anxiety —"

The dictator cut in. "There's no occasion for anxiety if we don't strike," he stormed. "As long as we keep out of Timovia —"

He caught himself. Blegoff's mouth opened with shock. For a moment neither man spoke, but both knew that last speech was a severe blunder. A bad slip for a dictator. Anyone else who dared question Troxia's destiny in Timovia could expect arrest.

Blegoff fought back an evil smile, lit a cigaret, walked around his tempestuous little master, who breathed like a racer caught changing colors before the finish.

"Gade Lasher, something's happened to you. What is it?"

The little volcano did not trust himself to answer.

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"I've got a right to know!" the general demanded. "As head of your armed forces, I'm the life blood of your personal power. But I've got to tell you, *your honor,* that my allegiance is not to any man, but to an ideal—the destiny of Troxia! It permeates every drop of my blood. For that ideal I'll send armies into hell—and they'll obey without a question. They're a blind mechanism, built to advance the Troxian ideal, and by God they'll die advancing it. BUT—if they suspect their figurehead has changed one iota —"

Blegoff paused, wondered how far he dared go. The dramatic little figure sat in a frozen stare, a strange mood for the proud, bristling Gade Lasher. The general lowered his voice.

"You've changed, Lasher. I see through it now. Retterlic is at the bottom of it. After the operation you were too warm toward him—gave him too much rope."

"You're off on the wrong foot," Lasher said quietly, but the general, drunk with his own boldness, plunged on:

"He poured his poison peace talk in your ears. You fell for it. Then, when you started to pass it on to the people in your speech, he walked out on you—left you dancing to his music —" Blegoff couldn't stop now. "But you saw the people didn't swallow it, so you used your quick wits and passed out with a headache! Very neat."

"Is that all?" Lasher asked, his face tinged with an angry smile.

"I hope I make myself clear that I consider Retterlic has been a menace —"

"You make yourself perfectly clear, Blegoff." As Lasher spoke he picked up a telephone that connected with his personal bodyguards who waited beyond his immediate walls.

"Purple Guards! Stand ready for emergency. I've just learned who is responsible for Retterlic's disappearance."

HE TURNED on Blegoff. The husky general went white, tried to move his quivering lips.

"All right, Blegoff, where is he?" The little man moved toward him. The general's words wouldn't come. His glibness was spent. He moved backward, step by step, his eyes locked by the maniacal gleam of Lasher's face, his blood chilled by the knowledge that Purple Guards might be pointing guns through partitions.

"He—he—isn't dead," he stammered. Wild fear shook incoherent words from his mouth as he tried to explain. "I'll find him —"

His fingers trembled, his burning cigaret dropped to the rug. Lasher's slight gesture told him to pick it up. He obeyed, but as he straightened up, his eyes still looked to the floor. Something held his attention—an ugly dark patch on the carpet—a blood stain reminiscent of another night in Lasher's study. He remembered well. Rogler and Ance had been members of the inner circle too. A messy deal, even for Blegoff. Lasher had helped him finish it.

His terrified eyes came up. He quailed. "Don't kill me, Lasher!—I promise —"

"I'm not going to kill you. Go. Don't come back till you bring me Retterlic. Our armies stand where they are until further notice. Go."

The general mustered strength to make a nervous salute and march out.

Lasher seized a telephone. "Doraine? . . . Thanks for the favor. I was in deep water until you flashed that note on the televisor. Didn't know you had the goods on him."

"I've tried to inform you for several days but —"

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"I understand. I've got to talk with you at once, Doraine—got to make some plans before hell breaks loose." He hung up and bolted for Doraine's private office.

DORAINE touched her face with make-up. She wished she could put sealing wax over her lips. It was dreadful—even criminal—keeping explosive secrets from her ruler. But she remembered the wise old doctor's vision of a saner Troxia and a happier world, once Lasher's terrible power collapsed.

Then the dramatic figure strode in and her heart pounded. She forgot nations and destinies and thought only of this tortured man. He needed her. The least she could do was help him cushion his inevitable fall.

He talked rapidly, erratically. His quarrel with Blegoff hung over him. He loosed his inner thoughts as a tornado scatters debris.

Doraine shuddered. He was cracking up, all right. No wonder. Hungry, famished for peace, yet haunted constantly by his own war menace. Hurled into the faces of world powers by his own catapult. Utterly powerless to resist his own momentum, now that his voice—his whip over the people—cut him down.

"Maybe there'll still be a chance for me," he gritted, "after Retterlic comes back and mends my head."

The girl trembled. How strong would his peaceful sentiments be, she wondered, if he knew the truth? Blegoff was already on the spot for his deceit. What chance would the doctor have who planted torture in the ruler's head? Or the confidential secretary who kept secrets from him? Or the Troxian Empire, if a reign of terror broke loose from the palace?

She felt his hand grip hers as he pressed her for advice. Desperate, his judgment frayed, he was on the ragged edge of rash action. A word from her would start him off toward the North Pole or the Moon—so long as he went on a mission of peace. He would go forth and arouse the world—

But there was that stubborn barrier again. It intruded upon every plan. The very word "PEACE!" recalled it. If Dr. Retterlic —

A buzzer sounded. Blegoff called from his quarters, much disturbed. Doraine turned the televisor to Lasher.

"I regret to report," the general said with alarm, "that upon phoning Molingbad Castle for Dr. Retterlic's release, I learn that he has escaped —"

"Escaped!!"

"There's no trace as yet, your honor."

"Well, there'd better *be* a trace!"

"I'll go to Molingbad at once to investigate personally," said Blegoff.

Lasher nodded and snapped off with a groan. Retterlic—his one hope! Out of the picture—perhaps for good. He would never trust anyone else to treat his head. He began to rave.

"Your honor." The girl's sympathetic manner quieted him. "I've something to tell you. . . . You mustn't hope that Dr. Retterlic will ever stop the pains that come with your emotional voice. . . . Don't ask me to tell you why. Just—believe me."

With his hands clamped over his head and his wide eyes staring, the crushed little man froze. Minutes passed, an hour, and more. The figure did not move. Doraine spoke to him, placed coffee before him, tried to divert his thoughts. He remained immovable. At last she went out to get an attendant, and when she returned he was gone.

CHAPTER V

On the Border

MONTHS later the weary figure of Dr. Retterlic plodded along the

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mountain path toward the hidden Kaable Inn. The teasing notes of old Kaable's bassoon echoed closer. There sat the Timovian inn keeper himself, his long legs dangling over the precipitous porch steps, his peasant clothes giving off brilliant colors under the spring sun. Brilliant music he made, too, thought the doctor.

The notes stopped, the angling figure came forward with a ready handshake.

"Well, if it isn't my old friend Doc!" He could never remember Retterlic's name. "Back for another visit. Welcome! How do you find things in Troxia?"

The doctor dropped into a rustic chair and sketched his story. "I haven't been back to Troxia. Been working on this side of the border. So many refugees needed assistance that I changed my plans. In fact, I may never return to Troxia again."

"I'm glad," said Kaable. "It's like I told you last fall, when you had just escaped from prison. Once out, better stay out."

"I've had a hard winter," Retterlic continued. "Troxian ruffians made lots of work. You know how they do —steal over at night, smash a few Timovian heads, post some Troxian propaganda, and steal back again. I'm so worn out from mending heads that I came back here for a rest. Hope you don't have too many guests on hand."

"None at present," said Kaable. "Not many come this route. Too difficult, you know. I guess that's why the Troxian soldiers never bother to guard it. I've had a slim winter—only one *pay* customer since you left. But he rolled in money, and thank Providence he hung on all winter. By the way, there's a curiosity." Kaable's long, gnarled face beamed. "You should have been here. He would have hired you, I'll bet my bassoon, if you can fix heads. His headaches gave him fits. I never knew anyone to put up such a scrap to overcome a handicap. I hated to see him go."

"No doubt." The doctor was not particularly interested. He had come back to this Timovian outpost to get a rest from aches and pains.

"I still can't figure that fellow out," the inn keeper went on. "Most remarkable guest I ever had. For instance, here's just one detail. Practically everyone who slips across from Troxia has some story about Gade Lasher—either knew him personally, or had a cousin who worked for him, or was once close enough to shoot him, or—you know. *You* didn't boast that way, but you're an exception."

"I've seen Lasher," the doctor muttered.

"Well, this fellow had the wildest story of all. He worried about Lasher, and tried to figure out his mind; and once in a burst of confidence he tried to tell me he *was* Lasher. And the way he looked and acted, you almost wanted to believe him. Trouble was, he was a fanatic on peace. Regular nut."

The doctor grunted. "Delusions of grandeur. He'd probably suffered too much persecution. Some cases are dangerous."

"Yes," Kaable said stoutly. "I felt that way about this one before he left. He'll be dangerous to Troxia."

Dr. Retterlic, unimpressed, turned the subject. "Have you heard rumors of the united front against Troxia?"

"Over the radio—yes. The great powers may pounce unexpectedly any day, they say."

"Ugly business," the doctor said. "Can't they see the green monster has stopped spreading of its own accord? Not a conquest all winter. Something's come over Gade Lasher. . . . I wish I knew —"

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"Just a breathing spell for Troxia. Waiting for the dictator to rest up. Radio says he's still recovering from that assassination incident. He'll march all over us this spring. I hope the powers strike first, though we're in for a slaughter either way."

THE doctor's troubled gaze rested on the dim blue mists of the endless valley below. He lit his pipe, and let the match burn down to his fingers. Kaable played a doleful air on the bassoon before he resumed his observations.

"Lots of undertones that Gade Lasher went insane."

"Yes, I heard that," said Retterlic.

"He hasn't made a public appearance all winter. Some think he's run away, others say he's dead. Maybe murdered." Kaable saw the doctor grow tense with interest. "What's your guess, Doc?"

"Gade Lasher's done," said the doctor, puffing hard at his pipe. "I'm not guessing; I know. He's through. I can't tell you whether he died or went insane or skipped the country, but I'm certain he'll never whip the Troxians into a white heat again."

"Think he's burned out?"

"You might say so." The doctor caught the other's quizzical eyebrow. "Frankly, I think he was made the victim of a scientific trick by one of his doctors after that bullet grazed him last summer."

Knaable shook his head. "Hardly. His own doctors wouldn't have the nerve. Besides, they're all in this together. They're out to pillage the world, the whole rotten bunch of them!"

Retterlic swabbed his high head with a handkerchief, and replied. "Time will answer that. In my opinion, Troxia has begun to cool. If the powers will hold back a little while, they can save themselves a terrific war."

The inn keeper tooted a skeptical phrase on his bassoon. "Sounds nice, Doc, but the Troxian war machine is too big to cool. If Lasher fades out, watch that sleek general, Blegoff, take over the palace and set off the fireworks. He's the one you hear on the radio now."

Rising abruptly, the doctor asked to be shown his room. Kaable provided him with such accommodations as the house afforded, apologizing for his failure to have the rooms in better order. "Too much to think about," he explained. "Those odds and ends in the corner were left by that nut I spoke of. He sent clear to the United States for some of those electrical instruments, and then didn't bother to take them along when he left. Hope they won't be in your way."

When Retterlic arose, refreshed, the following morning, the "odds and ends" caught his interest. Beautiful compact electrical instruments. Scraps of messages in handwriting. Evidently one of these new devices for transmitting signatures and written messages by radio. He had seen the ads in foreign magazines, "Write by radio." Here it was, ready for service.

The two distinct styles of handwriting on the scraps of paper argued that the instruments received as well as transmitted —

Retterlic's pulse jumped. That handwriting was Doraine's! Yes, and Gade Lasher's! Unmistakably. He snatched up the papers. Official communications with the palace. Advice for staving off Blegoff and others. Replies to foreign powers. An occasional note of personal sentiment. The final transcript from the feminine hand read: "Do be careful, Gade. I wish you luck."

The doctor flew through his break-

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fast and rejoined Kaable on the porch. "That nut—tell me more about him!"

CHAPTER VI

Human Fiber Is Tough

A HUGE question mark hung like fire in Retterlic's mind. Had Gade Lasher carried a pressure on the brain since war days? Did he lose his belligerence on the night that he traded a piece of skull for a silver instrument of torture? Gade Lasher's torture could have been no greater than that of Retterlic himself during these past months, sleepless with fear that he had brought ruin down upon a man who would normally be one of the greatest, noblest leaders of the age.

Bitter remorse stalked beside him wherever he went. He carried the trophy of that operation in his pocket, a lumpy, twice-scarred handful of bone, now well polished. If he could but bring himself to believe those nineteen years of Lasher venom were physically excusable, he would weep with joy—and then die of remorse for his crime.

Now he thrust his hand into his coat pocket as if to reexamine the famous Lasher head as he waited for Kaable's unaccountable story.

"He was a smallish person, middle aged, clean shaven, dressed in ordinary street clothes. He gave the impression from the way he marched up these stairs that he felt very important to himself. Probably a runaway army officer. He said he'd just been all over Troxia, through the prisons, along the Timovian front—everywhere—tracing a missing friend. A truck carried him past his next stop-off and he wandered up here by chance. Never knew when he crossed the line.

"He hungered for quiet, away from guns and planes and parades. Those Troxian sky fleets that demonstrate on our side of the line every few days gave him an awful shudder. He was awful stirred up when I told him about a neighbor boy who shook his fist at a plane once too often; though the lad still has a chance to live."

"A bomb?" Retterlic asked.

"Sure—just for practice. Well, this nut dealt me some crisp bills, slept for a week, and acted as if he might stay forever. Everything went fine except when I played my bassoon. He couldn't stand it. Certain notes gave him shooting pains in the head. I didn't believe it until I saw him go sick a few times.

"I kept playing now and then until he threatened to leave. My wife and I couldn't afford to let him go. But on the other hand I *have* to play my bassoon. Couldn't get through a winter without it. So together we worked on him."

"Worked—how?"

"Encouraged him to get over his headaches. He wanted to bad enough, but he didn't think it was humanly possible. You see, he carried a metal plate in his head from a recent operation, and he'd discovered it vibrated to certain tones and gave him stabbing pains —"

"I understand perfectly," said Retterlic, impatient.

"He swore it would drive him crazy before long. Well, we didn't doubt it; as far as we could tell he was nearly there already. But we didn't waste any sympathy. 'Human fabric is tough,' I told him. 'Just keep practicing, like I do on my bassoon.' I thought he'd get angry sometimes, but he was so damned ambitious he never let down. And when my wife told him the trouble she had treating her deafness, he took heart. You see, when she first got that bone conduction instrument for her head the vibration drove her to distrac-

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tion. But after a few months —"

"Did this man actually get over his pains?" The great weight on the doctor's heart strained to lift.

"He spent the whole winter at it. For weeks he was deathly sick, and we thought to ourselves, now we've done it. Then he began to gain. He made me play for him regular. Soon he ordered some communication instruments from the United States, part of them for a friend back in Troxia. Between times he would hike out on mountain trails, rehearsing speeches. And say—how that man could speak! He could make chills creep down the backbone of a mountain!"

"What did he talk about?"

"His mission—to save the world from the evil hand of Gade Lasher. He was a natural born prophet of peace."

THE doctor's pipe fell from his teeth. "Hold on. You said he *was* Gade Lasher."

"He tried to tell me that once, but he didn't get far. I knew it was just a mental quirk. He usually referred to himself as the 'New Lasher.' He argued that the former Lasher was dead. But sometimes he would go off on other tangents. Once he said, 'Suppose by some miracle Lasher changed, and lost all his hate—would the people keep him for a leader and follow him back to peace?' "

"Well, would they?" The doctor appeared as anxious as the New Lasher had been.

"Not a chance. Like I told this fellow, any change in Lasher would just be on the surface. He wouldn't know how to be honest and decent, he's so saturated with lies and trickery. If Gade Lasher started waving a banner of peace, the Troxians would quit him cold and leave him out on a limb —"

The narrator rambled on, not noticing that the doctor was lost in his own bitter thoughts. Retterlic had found the answer at last, perhaps, in the glib words of this peasant. The people would never believe in a changed Gade Lasher.

Still, perhaps *Gade* Lasher was dead. The New Lasher was a different person —so different that this peasant, who knew Gade Lasher's picture as well as his name, would not believe the two were one. If Lasher should continue this incognito—

"But he *did* recover from his head pains?" the eager doctor interposed.

"Yes. Miraculous, it seemed to us. But little by little, after hours and months of dogged work —"

Retterlic was on his feet. "When did he leave? Where did he go?"

"Well, about a month ago, right after he killed that Troxian soldier —"

"Killed? How'd that happen?"

"Just one of those night raids across our line. I had a tip that a neighbor, who lives seven miles down the mountainside, was in line for trouble one week, so I went down, and this New Lasher fellow went with me. One midnight they stormed in on us, four of them in green uniforms, and started crashing property right and left. We got the drop on them, and drove them off. But one of them whirled and took some pot shots, so this New Lasher picked him off. It so happened that his uniform was right for the New Lasher, who got into it and marched off at dawn without saying where he was going or why."

RETTERLIC hurried up to his room to the instruments. He found instructions, snapped the switches, began to write. In a few minutes the automatic marker swung with the swift, graceful motions of Doraine's hand.

An hour later, aglow with perspira-

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tion, the doctor strode back to the porch, dressed for travel.

"I have confidential news direct from the Troxian government. Five world powers are going to blast Troxia off the map in just one week if she fails to meet their ultimatum."

Kaable cut his notes so short they forgot to echo. "Ulti— What?"

"They gave Lasher notice to return all stolen lands and pay certain indemnities or *else!*"

"Then Lasher *is* alive?"

"My message didn't say as to that, but there's one thing certain. Your recent guest, the New Lasher, is very much alive!"

"The government has heard of *him?* Already?" The bassoonist beamed.

"*Heard* of him! He's got the whole empire in a riot with his peace talk. The New Lasher!" There was reverence in the doctor's voice. "He's the hope of Troxia now. Everyone who hears him joins his white crusade for peace—"

"They'll never get him!" the inn keeper exulted. "Once they get in hearing range he'll convert them. I tell you his words go right through you like an electric handshake!" Old Kaable was so worked up he didn't notice that the doctor was taking leave. "Looks as if the Troxian dictator has a revolution on his hands. What do you think?"

"Figure it out for yourself," Retterlic retorted as he struck off up the trail. "I've got an official mission for Troxia."

He patted his coat pocket as he hurried along the path. Not a single bassoon note caught up with him.

CHAPTER VII

One More Purge

THE sleek, natty General Blegoff tugged at the ends of his antennae-like mustache and glared at General Duboval, second in command. "We need one more purge." Blegoff hit his words savagely. "We've been duped long enough."

Duboval said nothing. He preferred to save his words until all ten members of the inner circle arrived. These secret meetings were perilous; they gave Blegoff the opportunity to purge on impulse.

"Duped!" the number one general repeated, "and by a damned female, at that!"

Duboval snapped on the radio, turned it to an international commentator who spoke from half a continent away.

"It is no secret," came the voice, "that the five powers comprising the United Front will loose their forces upon Troxia tomorrow noon, if their demands are not met by that hour. These nations deny that their action constitutes aggression. They insist that Troxia's cumulative offenses have driven them to this extreme. Until this belligerent empire is subdued there can be no security of life or peace of mind, nor any satisfactory business conditions.

"Hence, the world waits upon the brink of a precipice, beyond which may be catastrophe for civilization. Armies were on the move today.

"In the face of this crisis, the dramatic dictator of Troxia remains silent. He still does not show his face before his clamoring subjects, and they are growing suspicious that he may be dead.

"Meanwhile the White Crusade is gaining momentum every hour as the mysterious little man who calls himself the New Lasher challenges the Troxians with his peace program. Making scores of rousing speeches daily, he flies from city to city, and from hamlets to prisons to barracks, converting thou-

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sands. Tomorrow noon, the very hour set for the United Front to strike, this spectacular White Crusade will march upon the dictator's palace to demand acceptance of the New Lasher's peace program.

"It is a crucial moment for Troxia, but General Blegoff's armies are reported to be ready on the Timovian border. Moreover it is believed that the inner governmental circle, meeting secretly, are planning to crush the White Crusade if it reaches the palace. It is a question whether the government will respect the centuries old custom of Troxia that no peaceful assembly before the ruler's palace shall be dispersed with violence.

"Thus far the secret police have utterly failed —"

"Snap that damned thing off!" Blegoff shouted. Someone obeyed.

The irate general turned on the group. "I tell you, we've been duped. Lasher's either dead or out of the country. And one smart female has held us at bay —"

"With the help of the Purple Guards," Duboval interrupted.

"But I *talk* with Lasher every day by television," someone protested.

"One smart female secretary," the general reiterated, "with talking films and some clever forgery—"

"Can you prove it?" Duboval challenged.

"I'll prove it aplenty!" the general snarled. "If we had the nerve to go through with one more purge, we'd see for ourselves. Instead we're at a standstill, just because she's a female."

"We've been too damned free with our power to purge," Duboval snapped. "Where's Lippen?" No one answered. "Where's Blotchup?"

"Coming," said Blegoff. "He got in past the Purple Guards finally, to squeeze some proofs out of the superintendent of documents."

Blotchup arrived, threw a cardboard box on the table. "There's your evidence."

OUT of the box came scraps of film. The men snatched up the pieces, held them to the light, saw the bearded face of Gade Lasher.

Blotchup explained, "Lasher's speeches have been cut to hell. I've compared these scraps of sound track with the printed speeches. No question about it. Some smart technician has pulled out some sentences. Every time we shoot a question to Gade Lasher's confidential secretary, she touches a button that selects one of several stereotyped answers. Automatic movie instruments do the rest. We look on our televisor. Gade Lasher appears, roars an answer at us, and flashes off. That, my fellow simpletons, is how our dummy dictator has held the whip over us for the last —"

"One more purge!" Blegoff growled. "We'll draw lots to see who does it."

"Where's Lippen?" Duboval demanded. "We've no right to take action till Lippen comes."

Blotchup tossed his head toward General Blegoff. "The boss can answer that one."

A slap took the speaker across the mouth. Blegoff stood defiantly as the group of hard faces accused him; he drew back the hand that wielded a pistol as easily as it slapped. "All right," he snarled. "Lippen went soft and I let him have it. Got anything to say about it?"

"You're damned right!" Duboval shouted, starting toward him. "You've got no right to —"

Blegoff's pistol came up in a flash. Blotchup crashed into him. The bullet ripped through a framed canvas on the wall. Angry men piled into the fracas,

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shouted down the hot tempers. This was no time for a shake-up; although every member of the inner circle realized that under the surface the dog fight for Lasher's place was already on.

Blegoff recovered himself with a touch of the mustache, and recaptured his advantage as spokesman. He abandoned the topic of purges. "Tomorrow noon the powers march on us. There's only one course for us worth considering. Beat them to the jump. With this proof —" he motioned to the mess of film— "that Lasher is out of the picture, we have every right to take action. I propose we advance at once— turn our planes loose this very hour— start our tanks across Timovia."

A wrangle followed. At length the group came around to Duboval's view, who reasoned: "The powers can't attack before tomorrow noon, but they can waste a lot of energy getting ready. We've got a first class revolution on our hands, due to break tomorrow noon. We've got to quell it. All right. Before the hour of twelve we'll radio the United Front that we're preparing to come to terms. That will hold them off and waste their momentum. We'll extinguish this rebellion of White Crusaders first. Then we'll be in a position to strike the powers without warning."

"Suppose our message does not reach them in time?" Blegoff objected.

"I'll see that it does," Duboval asserted.

"Never mind. I'll take that responsibility myself. However," the number one general struggled to regain the leadership that threatened to slip out of his hands, "the crusaders who march on the palace must not know the war has been postponed. Their fear that the United Front is marching will blast their peace talk to hell."

There was general agreement on this point. Further wrangle on details followed. Duboval insisted that violence upon the crusaders would be unwise. It would only fan the flames. The right of Troxians to assemble before the palace had never been violated, even in this harsh regime of Gade Lasher. But General Blegoff had a plan that would quench the spirit of the peace rebels without violating the custom. The inner circle listened and accepted his plan. He gloated inwardly, sure that this clever non-violent strategy would win him the dictatorship. Then for one more purge: Doraine, Duboval, and the New Lasher.

AS SATURDAY dawned over the troubled continent, all Troxia trembled with roaring trains and trucks and planes, marching feet, shouting voices. Thousands of citizens sped toward the capitol, their white banners flying.

Doraine sat in her office from an early hour. She waited in vain for a word from her master. None came; neither did any communication come from her ambassador at large, Dr. Retterlic. Despair engulfed her. She had played her nerve-wracking game day after day. Until now she had miraculously held off the official who demanded a face-to-face interview with Lasher. But now the illusion must burst. The deadline for answering the ultimatum was at hand. She could not answer it. Today Gade Lasher must crash.

There was still one thing she could do—send the Purple Guards forth to find the New Lasher, whose identify they did not suspect, to escort him safely to the portals of the palace. If the rumors were true—if the White Crusade marched upon the palace today—this safeguard for the New Lasher would be the last official act of the already mythical lord of war.

The girl spoke her orders to the

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Purple Guards and they departed. That was all. She was now in the hands of the fates, and, should Blegoff seize the reins, she knew well enough what her fate would be. She reread for the hundredth time a few treasured notes in Gade Lasher's handwriting, buried her face in them, tried to cry, couldn't. He would go down in glory, championing the highest human cause; she would go down in ignominy, bearing the brunt of a cause she hated. All sentiment had gone out of her. She stared, glassy eyed, at the throngs of people moving over the scene beyond her window.

Far over the parade grounds that stretched before the palace portico they spread, a multicolored restless sea of humans. White banners waved, bands played, people sang and shouted for their champion.

The right to assemble peaceably before the palace! That was one right, thought Doraine, that even Gade Lasher in all his past brutality had forgotten to revoke. And now, transformed into a prophet of peace, he would have the benefit of his oversight.

Dust rose from below Doraine's window. The crowds began to move back. A clamor of agitation sounded, grew to an uproar of alarm. Soldiers marched down the palace steps in tight ranks, advanced slowly but steadily into the parade ground. The disorganized throngs moved backward and outward before the rhythmic tread of feet.

A stunt! Doraine saw through it at once. On they came, rank after rank. Blegoff's strategy, she knew. It was he who marched these troops through the palace to crowd the White Crusaders back. Technically Blegoff was not violating the tradition, for the soldiers used no bayonets, aimed no guns. They simply marched in tight formation, as if to add their numbers to the peaceable assembly. There were a few shouts of "Stand your ground!" but no civilians stood.

WHEN the last regiment found its place, the mass of green uniforms filled a vast circle before the portico. To the amazement of the tightly packed thousands of White Crusaders outside this symmetrical forest of green, every soldier stood at attention, and every line of heads faced *outward!*

In the face of this trick, the New Lasher appeared on the portico, escorted by the Purple Guards, and began to speak. His audience was the irregular fringe of variegated color that extended beyond the circle of solid green. The uniformed men were to all intents not a part of the audience; they were simply an obstruction over which he must talk.

Fortunately, the loud speakers carried out to the corona of White Crusaders. They waved their white handkerchiefs as a salute, and called their applause over the heads of the soldiers who faced them. Thus the speech went forward.

"Today Troxia lives in the insanity of war. Who of you would not trade this madness for a rich, wholesome, normal life?"

Penetrating, vibrant notes went out over the amplifiers. The people listened, enthralled, as the marvellous peace program unfolded before them.

"I bring you hope of peace and prosperity which you have not known in years —"

Employees in the palace edged out onto portico to listen. Spaces around the columns filled with all manner of persons, from humble attendants to plotting members of the inner circle. Doraine found an obscure corner.

Every word entranced her. She could hardly believe this was the same

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Gade Lasher. His closely cropped hair, clean-shaven face, crisp white suit altered his appearance radically. Even his voice was different. Powerful as it was before, it now carried a new depth and a penetrating ring beyond any voice she had ever heard. Words sang out like bells on a still night.

"You want a great Troxia! You cannot get it out of death and destruction! You must create wealth, not destroy it! You must build —"

The trenchant message searched to the core of every heart, awakened old forgotten longings with new hope. Here and there men in uniform strained to catch a glimpse of this fountain of power. They remembered they were human beings as well as soldiers.

The picture of Troxia, her needs, her potentialities, grew vivid before every listener. Officers, fascinated by this new perspective, forgot their charges and turned to face the speaker. Gradually the ranks were electrified by the speaker's irresistible dramatic power. They shifted positions to gape at the speaker in unconscious admiration.

"Now that I have described to you the program of industry and building and trade which will bring you security and the comforts of —"

Clunk! The amplifiers chopped off. To most of the listening thousands the white little figure of the New Lasher became only a silent pantomime, waving his arms in the air. An airplane bearing Troxian colors roared overhead.

A NEW voice sounded. "General Blegoff speaking." He had intended to order the troops to do an about-face. It was unnecessary. "You see me standing on the second level of the palace porch, directly above the speaker to whom you have been listening. I now give you the salute."

Thousands of habit-conditioned arms went up in response.

"I have an emergency message. It is twelve o'clock. At this very hour the United Front of enemy powers, jealous of the glories we have won, march upon us. To talk of peace now —"

The Troxian plane roared closer. Blegoff lifted his voice. "To talk of peace now is to invite death!"

Somewhere within the palace technicians of the Purple Guards worked frantically to splice freshly cut wires.

Blegoff roared, "I demand, in the name of Troxia —"

Unseen technicians succeeded. The New Lasher's voice rang out over the strident cry of the general. An incoherent jumble. Then a third voice boomed into the pandemonium, as it descended from an amplifier in the airplane overhead. The crowd roared its distress; the discord was complete.

But as the plane swooped lower, both Blegoff and Lasher stopped in surprise as they recognized the voice of the long lost Dr. Retterlic. All ears strained to the message out of the skies.

"Your ambassador-at-large —" the words came slow and clear—brings you the official report from the United Front. The world powers, impressed by the Troxian peace movement, have agreed to withdraw their ultimatum. Heads of nations will confirm this report by radio today."

General Blegoff went white with anger, backed away from his microphone as the mighty cheers rose from the multitude. The ground was cut from under his feet.

As the plane roared off, the New Lasher loosed his volcanic powers to demand that the Troxian government accept the peace program.

"But who is the Troxian government? *You* are! The empire must be ruled as *you* dictate. Do I hear you

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ask, what of the iron hand of Gade Lasher? My people, let me answer the question you have been asking these many months. Gade Lasher, the lord of war, is no more!" A deathly silence held the multitude. "But before he departed this earth, he chose me, his namesake, who deplored his every act, to undo the mistakes he made. I have pledged myself to that responsibility!" A tremendous cheer. "With your support I shall take over the reins of Troxia this hour, and be your ruler until you choose to elect another. Do I have your support?"

The vast audience instantly became a sea of flashing white waves as the thousands gave the salute of peace. Soldiers and civilians alike waved handkerchiefs and gave their voice to the victorious tumult.

General Blegoff, now forgotten, looked down upon the scene. He had but one weapon left. He clutched it, aimed it at the little white figure below him. Then sharp pains cut through his chest—twice—and again. His handsome body crumpled. No one in the vast audience seemed to notice. Duboval's pistol was almost silent.

"The new regime can do without you," said Duboval.

LATE that night after the tumult and shouting had died, three guests still remained with the New Lasher in the dictator's historic study.

Dr. Retterlic and the transformed Lasher held their hand-clasp for some minutes.

"What a handicap I gave you!" the doctor said. "I never supposed you'd rise from under it. If you want it removed —"

"No," said Lasher. "Instead of breaking me, it made me—in more ways than one."

"But doesn't it ever pain you?"

"Like fire. But I've learned to endure it. And do you realize how valuable it is to my vocal equipment? It gives me a resonance I'll never part with."

The great weight over the doctor's heart lifted and vanished into thin air.

"But tell me, Retterlic," said the transformed dictator, "How'd you manage that miracle with the powers?"

"Mostly through good fortune," said Retterlic. "I found the heads of five nations meeting together, and my scientific connections lent support to my story. I pointed out the growth of the White Crusade as Troxia's new hope. Then I assured them that Gade Lasher's reign of hate was at an end. I proved my point with Exhibit A."

"Exhibit A?"

The doctor brought a polished slab of bone from his pocket. "There lies the hatred of the world in the palm of my hand. I think I'll go find a trophy case for this specimen. Good night."

"I must go, too," said the girl, following Retterlic to the door.

"I'll walk down the corridor with you," said the New Lasher. As they strolled he declared, "I'll never find words for the gratitude I owe you, Doraine."

"And you a master of oratory!" she chided. She was suddenly lighthearted, carefree.

Lasher smiled. "An orator must support his words with appropriate gestures—the use of his arms —"

They paused in the alcove before Doraine's door. Lasher's arms lent themselves to the use most appropriate to the devotion that welled from his heart, the words that poured from his lips. In eager embrace the New Lasher discovered a new and very lovely Doraine—and a human emotion the old Lasher never knew.

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

sent, he destroyed. But also there were the burnt remains of three of Bill's experimental notebooks.

They were written in Bill's system of shorthand, which Will understood. The first two were old, and of no particular interest. The last, however — unfortunately the most badly charred of the three—was an account of Bill's attempts to infuse life into his replicas of living creatures.

The last pages were about the experiment of creating another Joan, and the last recognizable entry read:

"This clumsy business of pumping through pipes, in the manner of a blood transfusion, left a small scar at the base of Doll's neck, the only flaw in an otherwise perfect copy of Joan. I resented. . . ."

The rest was burned away.

To the astonishment of the police inspector, Will turned without saying a word and hurried back into the ward.

"Let me examine your neck, dear, I want to see if you've been biting yourself," he said, with a false lightness.

Wonderingly, the girl allowed herself to be examined.

There was not the slightest sign of a scar anywhere on her neck.

"You are Joan," he said, and embraced her as satisfactorily as her injuries would permit.

"I am Joan," she repeated, kissing and hugging him back.

And at last they knew again the blessedness of peace of mind.

For once, Fate, which had used them so hardly, showed mercy, and they never knew that in the packet of Bill's receipted accounts, which Will had destroyed, was one from a famous plastic surgeon, which began:

"To removing operation scar from neck, and two days' nursing and attention."

THE END

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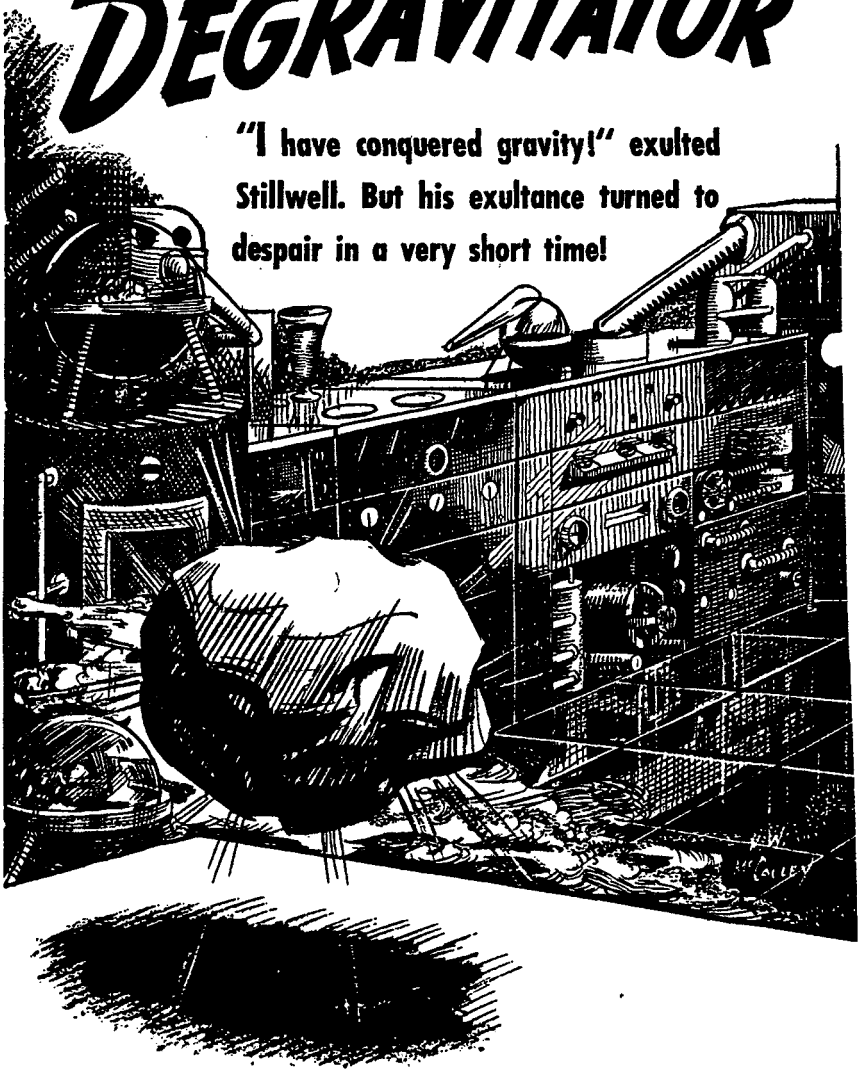

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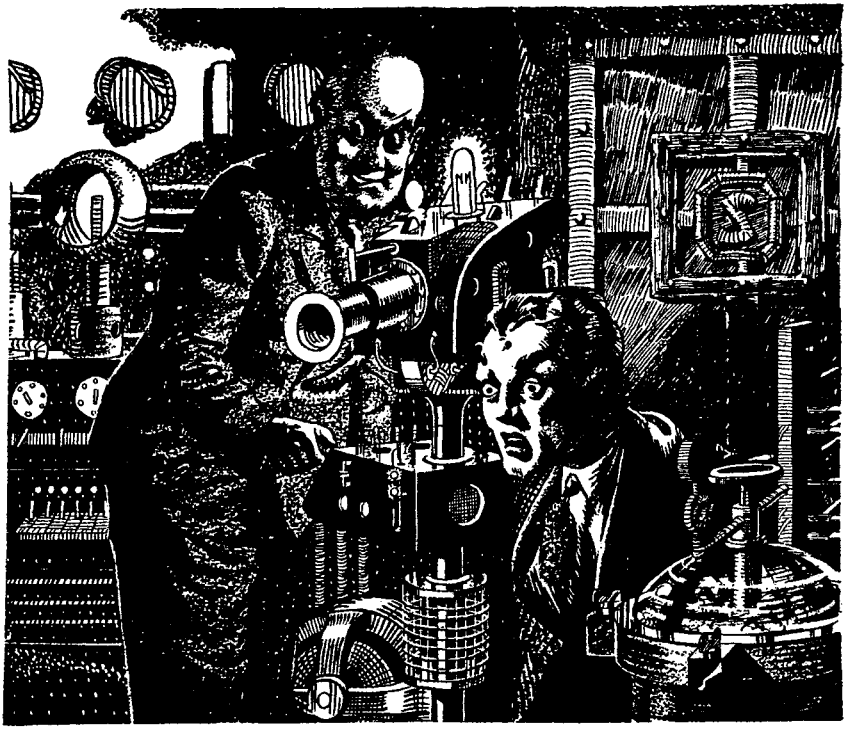

BY CHARLES R. TANNER

THE quiet which usually reigns over the main hall of the big library was suddenly broken by a crash, and the sound of falling books. A girl's scream followed immediately, and the scraping of chairs as startled readers leaped to their feet. I looked up from the article I had been reading, and was not surprised to find that my opinion of the cause of the accident was correct.

At the upper end of the hall, leaning over a fallen rack of books, with a pained and apologetic look on his face, was my friend Professor Isaac N. Stillwell.

The professor's huge bulk (he is six feet tall and weighs over two hundred and ninety pounds) seemed even larger than usual today. He wore a light gray topcoat, and light colors always enhance a person's size; and this, combined with the fact that the little assistant librarian who stood looking woefully down at the fallen books was a small thin woman, made him seem almost globular. He had removed his hat, of course, and the light from the skylight above, striking his immense bald head, made it shine like the proverbial billiard ball, and added immeasurably to the effect of ponderous dignity. And that huge form was stooping, or attempting to stoop, to remedy the damage done.

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I left my seat and hurried over to the scene of the accident. Though Stillwell is one of the most proper and dignified men I ever knew, there is about him a certain clumsiness that is cumulative, and when one accident occurs to him, it is better to check him at once or you will have half a dozen on your hands.

So I hurried over and tapped him on the shoulder and after a nod of recognition, I motioned him to one side. I assisted the little librarian to pick up and stack the books, and then turned to my friend. He broke into whispered thanks, but I silenced him and then made my way back to the table where I had been sitting. Stillwell followed and raised his heavy eyebrows in interest when he saw what I had been reading.

"'A Note on Further Aspects of the Universal Field Theory,' eh?" he whispered. "You know, Clement, I may have a few remarks to make on that subject myself, before long."

I noticed several of the readers about the table glance up with that peculiar look that people assume to emphasize annoyance. I made a gesture of silence and Stillwell, after giving a glance about, motioned me to follow him. I abandoned my magazine with a sigh of regret and arose. We left the library.

"Quite a coincidence, Clement, my boy," said the huge professor as we stepped outside. "I mean, finding you in there reading of Einstein's theory of a universal field. You see, I've been rather eager to demonstrate a little experiment I have been working on. Could you come down to the house for an hour or two?"

I SAW no reason why I couldn't. In fact, I am always eager to observe the experiments of my portly friend. Stillwell's intellect is as ponderous as his body, and his versatility is so great that there is hardly a science in the books that has not been assisted by his brilliant aid. Of course, there is a certain touch of uncertainty about him, due to that amazing clumsiness of his; but this really adds a certain tang to contact with him, and so I have never yet refused when chance offered to watch this genius work.

So now I led the way to my machine and we started off toward the professor's house, and the beginning of the strangest adventure that has yet befallen me.

For, once in the professor's home, we repaired at once to the laboratory in the basement. Here, in the middle of the floor, surrounded by a maze of bent and broken sections of pipe, yards upon yards of twisted wires and the remains of half a dozen big shattered vacuum tubes, stood an odd box-like apparatus, having at one end a long extending tube of metal like an old-fashioned blunderbuss. The blunderbuss pointed to a little table with a white enameled top, on which lay a group of crystals, among which I recognized quartz, beryl and almandite, as well as a huge stone.

"Now, Clement," began the professor, as soon as he had removed his hat and coat. "I can see that you are wondering and speculating already. So I'll get right to the point. As you doubtless know, modern theory considers gravity not as a force, but as a condition of space, a 'warp'* I believe it is popularly called, caused by the very presence of matter. Suppose there was some way of neutralizing—or rather, of heterodyning—the warping impulse. What would be the result?"

"Why—" I looked at him, incredulously. "Why, I suppose it would be

*All matter, even a single atom, warps the space surrounding it, to a certain extent. The resulting warp affects other matter so that its path of least resistance is no longer in a Euclidean straight line, but along a line that tends toward the warping body of matter.—Ed.

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to neutralize, or even to reverse gravity. But surely it will be hundreds of years before science progresses sufficiently to enable it to do that."

"On the contrary, my dear Clement," the professor chuckled, heavily. "On the contrary, that is just what I have brought you here to see. I have devised a means to accomplish that phenomenom, and this is it, right here."

He moved over to the box-like apparatus and, ignoring my exclamations of wonder, he proceeded to adjust the various dials and switches which covered one side of it. Presently he removed the crystals from the table, all but the large boulder, and then he turned again to me.

"Now watch, my boy," he exclaimed. "You probably know that weight is a mere function of mass, do you not? Well, the recently discovered positron has, I believe you will recall, a *negative* mass. It weighs so much *less* than nothing! Using this as a base of my investigations, and remembering that the proton, which contains most of the *mass* of the atom, is like the positron, positive *electrically*, I have succeeded in inducing negative mass in the proton."

He made another adjustment or two on his machine and went on:

"This machine is the first one I designed, and so it is rather crude. It only works on close-packed solids, and is very hard to adjust. I have already worked out, in principle, a far simpler apparatus, that will work on anything. But this will do for a demonstration."

HE turned on a switch and I heard a whine from the box, followed by a deep sigh. I half expected some funny-colored ray to shoot out from the blunderbuss, but if a beam of force did shoot out, it was quite invisible. But the results most decidedly were not.

The piece of rock was a heavy thing and twice as big as my head, but almost immediately after the switch was turned on, it rose like a toy balloon and drifted to the ceiling; and there it stayed, bobbing about with every slight current, while I stared at it with open mouth and the professor rubbed his freckled, pudgy hands together and beamed.

At last I regained my voice and burst into frantic congratulations. "Professor," I cried, "this is the biggest thing you've ever done! Why, there's millions in this. The burdens of the world will be lifted from its shoulders. A hundred inventions will grow out of this one discovery! We can make anti-gravity machines and sell them by the million! This will be the biggest thing since the gasoline engine. It'll turn the world upside down!"

The professor beamed again. He caught a portion of my enthusiasm and patted his box affectionately. "This is only a very crude affair, Clement," he protested. "Just wait until I show you my perfected model. It will work on anything, not just boulders. And I think it will be far more compact, too."

"Well, we sat there in the lab for an hour or more, discussing the possibilities of the apparatus. The professor saw only the fact itself; he had made a machine that produced weightlessness, and that was that. But I am a reader of science fiction, and I have read a dozen times of the possibilities of anti-gravity; so I was able to point out any number of ways in which the principle could be applied. When I parted from the professor at last, we were both flooded with enthusiasm over what was to come.

CHAPTER II

Catastrophe!

FOR the following two weeks, I did my best to control my impatience while the professor worked on his im-

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proved model. At last, early one summer evening, the long-expected call came and I hurried over to his house to inspect the finished invention. The professor met me at the door with an apologetic look on his face.

"I'm afraid I must postpone my demonstration, Clement," he said regretfully. "My very good friend, Dr. Hayland, has just called me and requested my presence at his home immediately."

"Hop in," I said, a little disappointed. "I'll drive you over to Hayland's and maybe you can complete your business and get back in time to show me your gadget, even yet."

Stillwell thanked me and squeezed himself into the car beside me, and we started on our way. We had gone but half a block, however, when there was a whishing sigh from the right front tire and I drew up to the curb and stopped, gritting my teeth to suppress an oath.

"Puncture!" I said wrathfully. "It would happen at a time like this. And— Oh, my gosh!"

"What's the matter?" Stillwell looked at me anxiously.

"My jack! I left it at home in the garage. Where in thunder can I get a jack around here?"

The professor was puzzled for a moment, then: "Clement, wait a moment till I run back home. I'll give you a demonstration of my perfected degravitator and supply a jack of sorts at the same time."

He squirmed out of the machine and waddled hastily up the street in the direction of his home. A minute or two and he appeared again, carrying a small object in his hand. When he reached the machine I saw, to my surprise, that the object resembled a rather complicated pistol.

"Here's the degravitator, Clement. What do you think of it, now?"

"You mean—" incredulously, "that that thing is the whole degravitator?"

"Quite so. The thing is not very complicated. You see, the real work is done by the atoms of the object degravitated. This is only used to initiate the action. Now watch how I utilize it as a jack."

He directed the "gun" on the front of my machine and squeezed a sort of trigger. As in the more complicated machine, there was no sign of a ray or other form of light, but the machine jumped back an inch or two, and then the front slowly rose an inch or so off the ground. Stillwell snapped off the force and turned to me.

"There now, I think you can fix your tire, eh?"

I nodded and got busy, and in no time the tire was changed and we were scrambling back into the car.

Now whether it was the novelty of the thing or the fact that we were in such a hurry, I do not know; but the fact remains that both Stillwell and I forgot that the front of the car had been rendered weightless until we had gotten into the car and I had started it. But then we were reminded of it, and in no uncertain way. No sooner had I started the thing than the front wheels leaped up like a bucking broncho, and the car dashed merrily down the street on its "hind legs." I grabbed frantically at the emergency brake and, out of a corner of my eye, I caught a wild glimpse of Stillwell's pudgy legs, as that adipose gentleman went head over heels into the back of the car. The brakes squeaked wildly, and the front of the car gently settled back to the ground.

Fluttery with excitement, I leaped out of the car and, jerking the rear door open, helped the professor out, not a little upset and bruised. He pulled himself together and, shaking his head dolefully, proceeded to neutralize the front of the car. Then we once more got

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under way and at last reached Dr. Hayland's.

INASMUCH as I had no idea how long it would take Stillwell to complete his business with Hayland, I suggested that I wait awhile outside. Stillwell agreed and entered the house, and to my surprise, emerged again in less than a minute. His brow was black as he pushed his way into the machine beside me and: "That was somebody's idea of a joke," he snorted. "Hayland hasn't been in all evening. Some half-wit thought he was being funny. If there's anything I hate, Clement, it's misplaced 'humor.' Let's go home."

His irritation increased rather than diminished as we rode back to his house, for nothing could have ruffled his stupendous dignity more than to be the victim of a practical joke. By the time we reached his home, he was bordering on a case of "jitters."

"There'll be no use of my attempting to give you a demonstration tonight, Clement," he sputtered. "Suppose you just excuse me and come around tomorrow evening."

So, unable to do otherwise, I offered such sympathy as I could without further hurting his feelings, and leaving him, I drove off to my home.

I was quite convinced that I would see him no more that day and so you can imagine my surprise, when I drove up to my own house, some ten minutes later, to find my ward, Marjorie Barrett, and my housekeeper, Mrs. Potter, both awaiting me on the porch. They burst into excited cries when they beheld me.

"Professor Stillwell just called up—" began the Pest.

"And he wants you to come right over—" continued Mrs. Potter.

"He says it's terrible. Whatever *it* is," went on Marjorie.

"And he says under no circumstances bring the police," Mrs. Potter added.

"But he wants you to hurry, for he's in a very dangerous situation. And I'm going with you. Move over," and suiting the action to the word, the Pest seated herself beside me and slammed the door. We waved to Mrs. Potter, I spun the car around and we were off.

I quizzed Marjorie all during the ten minute ride back to the professor's house, but learned nothing save what she and the housekeeper had already told me. So it was with uncertainty and peculiar misgivings that I rang the bell at Stillwell's home and waited impatiently for an answer.

At the second ring, I thought I heard a muffled call from within. I looked questioningly at the Pest, but that young lady brushed etiquette aside by trying the doorknob and striding boldly into the house. I followed and was met by a call from the dining room.

"Clement!" came the familiar booming tones of Stillwell's voice. "Is that you? Come back, for heaven's sake!"

We rushed into the room and I gave a gasp of involuntary amazement. There was no sign of the professor. Then the Pest screamed and pointed to the ceiling. I glanced up, and my gasp was cut short half uttered, to be immediately succeeded by another and larger one. Bobbing about in the air currents occasioned by our entry into the room, like a toy balloon that had escaped from the hands of a child, and resting lightly against the ceiling, was the ponderous, the dignified Professor Isaac N. Stillwell!

CHAPTER III

The Pursuit of the Plunderer

"STILLWELL!" I cried, incredulously. "How—how did you get

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up there? What in the world has happened?"

"I—I was held up. There was a robber here and I was held up."

The Pest looked at him and veiled her astonishment with sarcasm. "You're still being held up, if you ask me," she remarked drily.

"Please, my dear," groaned the professor. "This is a most ignoble position. Please remember this is no time for levity."

"Nor for levitation, either, for that matter," insisted the irresponsible one.

The combat between offended dignity and the realization of his dangerous position rendered the professor utterly speechless. He sputtered helplessly for a moment or two until I came to his rescue. I waved the Pest to silence and asked him, in as normal a tone as I could assume, just what had happened and what we could do about it.

"When you left me," the professor explained when at last he could speak again, "I entered the house and at once heard a noise, out here in the dining room. I hastened out, and there he was! It flashed instantly into my mind that that supposed call from Hayland was a hoax to get me out of the house while he pursued his depredations. With a presence of mind which I usually possess at such times, I immediately realized that, unarmed as I was, I was entirely at the mercy of this creature, and, casting about in my mind for some bit of strategy to deceive him, I thought of my degravitator. As you have noticed, its resemblance to a revolver is rather striking, and I depended on it to pass for one, at least until I could gain the upper hand.

"So I immediately drew it from my pocket and demanded that the criminal stand and surrender. His actions, however, were most unexpected. Instead of raising his hands in a gesture of surrender, as would have been the obvious thing to do, the incredible wretch threw himself upon me and seized my wrist.

"We struggled, and due to my unfortunate corpulence, I must admit that he had the advantage. In less than a minute he had twisted the degravitator from my hand and, directing it full upon my breast, he squeezed the trigger, closing his eyes as he did so, expecting, I suppose, the usual sharp report.

"There was no report, of course, so he immediately opened his eyes again, and by that time, the degravitating influence had acted upon me and, rendered weightless, I was ascending slowly to the ceiling. I was horrified, and the rise was accompanied by a most uncomfortable feeling of *falling;* but my horror, I believe, was nothing compared to that of the criminal.

"His eyes popped out, for a moment he seemed rooted to the spot, then he uttered a wild cry and fled out through the kitchen and the back door, frightened out of his wits! And here is the calamity, Clement — in his fright, he never thought of dropping the degravitator, he departed, carrying it with him!"

"The degravitator gone?" This was indeed a calamity. "But, Stillwell, how will you get down?"

"How will I get down, indeed!" cried the once-heavy professor in agony. "It would take me weeks to build another degravitator with which to neutralize my condition. And in the meantime, I should have to float around up here, listening to the crude puns and alleged humor of—of Miss Marjorie."

"Aw, now, professor, don't get up in the air over my remarks," begged the Pest. "I'll be good. Honest. I'll—I'll go out and find your de-what-you-may-call-it. Will that help?"

"That's it! That's it, Clement. That's just what you must do. Go out and

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find it. Surely the criminal will leave some kind of trace. Please, my friends, say you'll do that."

I HASTENED to assure Stillwell that we would do our best, and Marjorie and I at once hastened out the back door into the yard behind the house. There we stopped, uncertain.

"Do you suppose we'll find any trace of him?" I asked, dubiously.

For once the Pest was serious. "I don't suppose we'll find the slightest sign of him," she admitted. "But I had to calm the poor old fellow somehow. He was getting all worked up and excited. Now he has hope, anyhow." She paused and broke into a chuckle. "He was always wanting to lose weight, wasn't he?" she laughed.

I frowned. I did not share her delight in poor puns and besides, the constant howling of a dog in the next door yard was beginning to get on my nerves. I had noted it, unconsciously, even before we left Stillwell's house, but now it was definitely forced upon my conscious mind. Darkness had fallen by this time, however, and it was impossible to see why the dog was howling. Then a sudden thought came into my mind.

"That dog!" I cried. "Listen!" I hastened over to the low wire fence that separated the two yards, vaulted over it and rushed in the direction of the howling. Sure enough! There, some eight or ten feet in the air, dangling by a chain that was fastened to the front of a dog house, and howling at the top of his voice, was an unfortunate brindle bull pup.

"Marjorie!" I called. "He's been this way," and as my eye lit upon an open gateway leading to an alley—"He went out this way."

Marjorie joined me in the alley and we looked around uncertainly. The alley ended blindly, further along in one direction, but in the other—

"Come on!" I shouted. "He must have run down to Blair Street. Maybe Marco, the fruit peddler, can tell us where he went."

Away we went down the alley, wildly enthused by the unexpected success of our chase. We could see lights in Marco Di Rosa's fruit store and knew that it was open. We felt sure that if our fugitive had passed that way, Marco would have noticed him. So we sped around the corner with hope in our hearts—and stopped with dismay in our faces.

For there was an awning hanging over the front of Di Rosa's little store and, hanging up in the awning was a huge heterogeneous collection of apples, peaches, cabbages, pineapples and watermelons, in the midst of which struggled futilely the little black-moustached figure of Marco!

"He's been here!" shouted the Pest. "Which way did he go, Marco?"

The little fellow rolled his eyes in her direction, eyes which were almost all white with fear and excitement, but he said never a word.

"Get him inside," I cried. "That's an old awning, and if it ever splits—" I said no more, but looked about for some means to reach the little man. My eye lit on a long pole like a clothes prop and seizing it, I instructed Marco to take hold of it, and so drew him down to where we could grasp him.

THEN we brought him into the store and let go of him, and he floated up to the ceiling. The Pest brought him a drink of water and presently his fright began to lessen. I asked him what had happened, but it was some little time before he could answer. Then:

"Look, Mr. Jordan," he stammered.

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"I'm standin' by my fruit stand, see? Justa standin' there, wond'rin' is the Reds gonna win those pennant. An' aroun' that corner comes a man. Little fella, he's got a gun in he's hand. I'm scared, I make a jump for the door to go inside.

"But I guess that fella think I jump for him. Up come the gun, an' he's pull the trigger! Santa Maria—I'm scared then. I think—'Gooda-night, Marco, you're sunk now.' But no! Mister Jordan, I don't sink. I'm rise!

"Up I go into the awning, an' up go the apple, up go the peach and up go the cabbage an' the pineapple! An' that feller, he's look more scared than me. He scream an' close his eye—an' away he run!"

"Which way did he go, Marco? We've got to catch him, or you'll never get down again. Tell us which way he went."

Marco pointed down the street. "He's run down there. An' across the street an' around the corner into DeCourcey. I watch him, you bet."

Without more ado, the Pest and I were off. Down Blair, across the street and into DeCourcey Ave. And as Marco's little fruit store disappeared behind us, we looked down DeCourcey and beheld a most amazing sight. Some little way down the street, two gentlemen sat on the curbstone, two gentlemen clad most properly in full evening togs—white tie, tails, and all the trimmings. As we drew near them, we saw that they sat, not actually on the curbstone, but fully a foot above it, and even before we came up with them, we could hear them discussing the situation in loud but slightly befuddled tones.

"Your conclushions, my dear Dinwiddie, are almosht certainly erroneous," the nearest of them was saying. "I have not—have not been drinking to exshess. This is the firsht time I have been drunk since—since Thursday."

"Do not tell me I am wrong, Claypoole, my boy," answered the other. "I—I have been here before. I was in Doak's Sanitarium for two months, one time. Just you wait until the parade begins."

"Parade?" The first one was curious. "I was not under the impression there was to—to be a parade, Dinwiddie."

"There will be," announced Dinwiddie. "There will be elephants and reptiles. There are always elephants and reptiles. Pinks ones, p-probably."

"I am shtill unconvinced," insisted Claypoole. "I shtill claim that the fellow killed us. I f-feel like a dishembodied shpirit—and I am acting like a dishembodied shpirit. How else could I be sitting here on—*nothing?*"

WE had stopped before them, but they paid absolutely no attention to us, going right on with their amazing conversation. The Pest finally interrupted.

"Snap out of it!" she commanded sharply. "This is real. Where did the man go who shot at you?"

Dinwiddie raised a bleary eye. "Shpirit, begone!" he said loftily, and Claypoole, glancing up too, remarked complacently: "Now the animals will be coming."

Exasperated, and quick-tempered as usual, the Pest suddenly reached forward and gave Claypoole a resounding box on the ear. The result was surprising—the man bounded across the sidewalk, struck up against a building, rose some five feet into the air and slowly, slowly settled back to the sidewalk.

The Pest turned to Dinwiddie. "Come on, now! Which way did he go?"

A glimmer of sobriety flickered

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through the fog that showed on Dinwiddie's face. "Down that alley," he gestured. "I—I— What's the matter with me?"

"You stay right here!" I commanded. "You and your friend will be in a pretty bad fix if we don't find that fellow." We dashed down the alley, and I shouted to the Pest as I did so:

"The degravitator is weakening. It couldn't raise those fellows more than a foot off the ground."

CHAPTER IV

Happy Ending

THE alley in which we found ourselves ran between a big warehouse on one side and the back end of a theater on the other. There were no doors facing the alley in either building, but beyond these a group of slovenly tenements had their rear entrances. We would probably have lost the trail right there had not an incident occurred that brought things to a climax. As we passed one of the tenements, a window crashed above us and an article hurtled to the ground, while the terrified scream of a man followed immediately after. The Pest hurried over to pick up the object—a little wooden box of cigarettes.

"I've seen this sort of cigarette before," announced the Pest, excitedly. "I knew a fellow once—" she paused and a disgusted look spread over her face— "They're marihuana."

"We haven't time for that now," I exclaimed. "Come on."

"Wait a minute. I've got a hunch." She started for the forbidding dirty entrance of the building, and I followed perforce, if only to protect her. Guided by the cries that still came from above, we forced our way past a slatternly and protesting landlady and dashed up rickety stairs and down a dark hall to the room from which the cries were coming.

We threw open the door—and there he was. We knew that he was the man we sought, at once, for he was hanging like grim death to the edge of a big oak table, his feet kicking wildly in the air above him, while one scream after another burst from his lips. And lying on the floor was an object that I immediately identified as the degravitator.

The man saw us and broke into a string of imprecations. "Can't I even die in peace?" he screamed, kicking his legs wildly. "Is everything always goin' against me? I'm nuts, and I can't even kill *myself*, let alone anybody else."

I moved over and recovered the degravitator, narrowly dodging a kick from the floating sinner. I swiped at him angrily, knocked him loose from his grip on the table and he slowly rose to the ceiling. He broke into renewed screams.

"Come on, Pest," I said. "Let's get back to the professor."

"Wait a minute," she demanded. "I want to find out something. What's happened, you? How did you get in this fix?"

The thief eyed her truculently for a moment, and then dropped his eyes, abashed. "I don't know what's wrong with me, lady," he said. "But I guess I got it comin' to me. A friend of mine gave me a pack of muggles ciggies. Said they'd give me nerve. I tried one tonight, just before I tried to raid an old gink's house up on Vance Street. It had the craziest effect. Every time I shot anybody, it looked like they just floated right up into the air. Started right off for heaven, without ever waiting to die. It scared me so it drove me about nuts. I come home as fast as I could, just about crazy. I guess I was

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so scared I tried to bump myself off. I stuck that dam' gat to my head and pulled the trigger. Now look at me!"

"We can fix you up," announced the Pest. "But you'll have to come with us. Where can we get some twine?"

"There ought to be a ball of it in the left hand drawer of that chiffonier," the crook said, hopefully. "Do you really think you can fix me up?"

The Pest didn't answer, but went and got the twine. She tied it around his waist and started for the door, with the thief swinging along over her head.

"Take the rest of this twine, Clem," she directed. "We'll need it, before we get back to Stillwell's."

WELL, to make a long story short, some half an hour later we re-entered Stillwell's home, dragging along in the air behind us one thief, one fruit peddler, one badly scared and two arguing gentlemen in tails. Under Stillwell's direction, I recharged the degravitator, neutralized the entire group and brought them all once more back to normal weight. At once there ensued an argument as to the responsibility, which the Pest at last cut short.

"It's certainly not the fault of Marco or these two—er—gentlemen," she said. "And I don't see how any responsible person could blame this poor reefer," she indicated the thief. "And so, professor, it seems that in the last analysis, the blame must fall on you. Oh, I know what you're going to say," she went on as the professor raised his hand in protest. "It's a splendid invention and would lighten the cares and work of the world, I know. But it's not the sort of a thing that should be left lying around like an old pair of socks, where any ignoramus can pick it up and play with it. Put it away, and treat it like the laboratories treat radium, or dismantle it and forget it entirely until the world is more ready for it."

The huge professor smiled a little wanly. He was still shaken from his undignified sojourn on the ceiling.

"I think I shall forget it," he decided, meekly, as he tossed the degravitator into a desk drawer. "Yes, I really think I shall."

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 67

RALPH returned to consciousness to the knowledge of a throbbing head and a bandage across his eyes once again. He stirred slowly and the voices of Ed Rutter and Dr. Lloyd reached him simultaneously.

"Take it easy, Ralph; you're O.K.," Ed said. "But we were only just in time."

"In—in time? How? Why?"

"Thanks to me the police came to arrest Flint," Lloyd said modestly, after briefly recounting the earlier events. "We couldn't find him in his study, but nurses had seen him going toward your room. So we followed. We got him just before he could sink a hypo into you."

Ralph relaxed with a sigh. "Then that's settled! I cleaned up Maravok and you cleaned up Flint!"

"What!" Lloyd cried. "You mean you did something to cause Maravok to be destroyed?"

"Sure I did. . . ." Ralph related the full facts. At the end of it Lloyd drew a deep breath.

"This explains much!" he exclaimed. "I had a look at your eyes when you were unconscious and my tests showed they were almost normal. Something had shifted them out of that other plane to the normal one, but even my wide experience could not imagine what it could be. I thought it might have been the result of the blow Flint gave you when he hit you with a chair. Now I know the truth. The blast of flame in that other plane gave the necessary optical shock to slam your vision right back to normal after a brief spell of blindness, which you are now undergoing. In two days' time you'll be seeing as well as ever again."

"You mean it?" Ralph cried eagerly, sitting up again.

Lloyd glanced at Ed and smiled. "Ralph does not know it," he observed gravely, "but *stat magni nominis umbra* . . . He stands in the shadow of a mighty name . . . And the owner of that name never makes mistakes."

The little scientist was right. Two weeks later Ralph was back on his Shaft.

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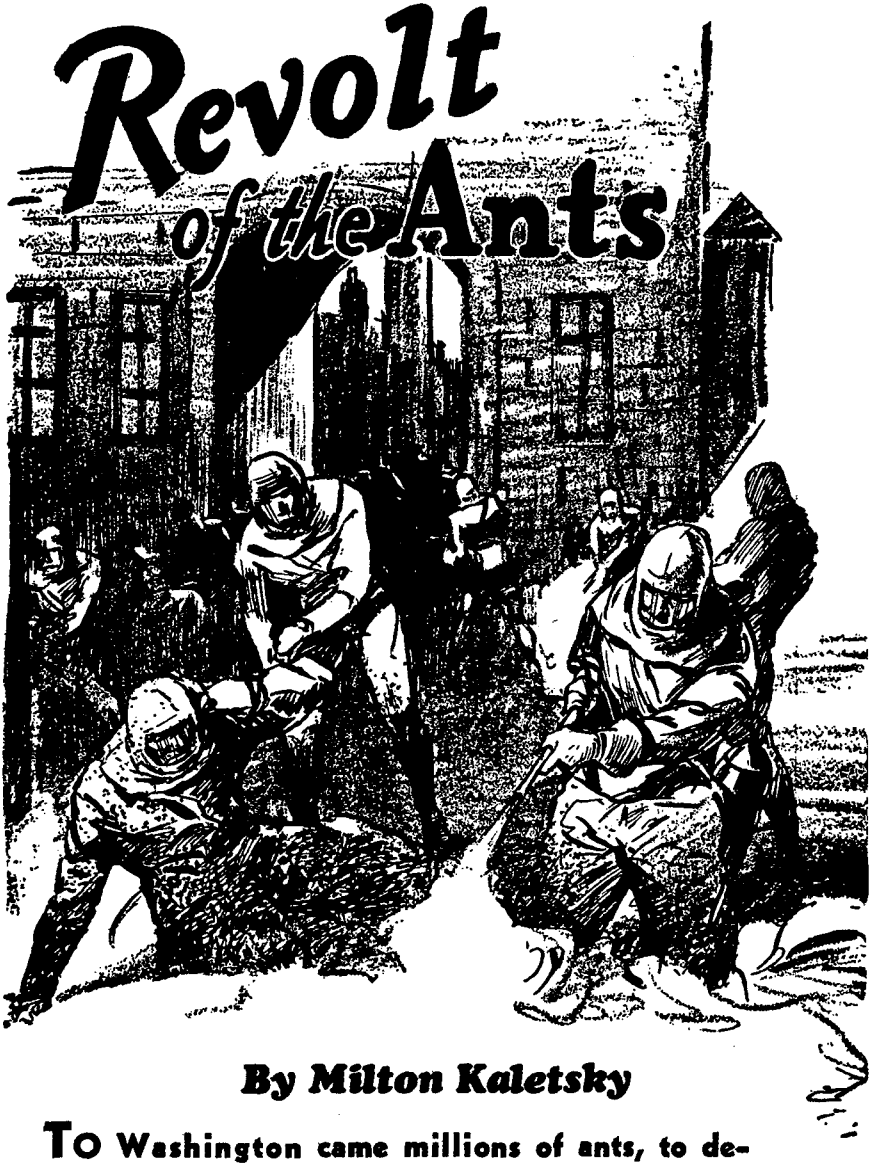
Revolt of the Ants



By Milton Kaletsky

TO Washington came millions of ants, to demand the right to vote. Met with refusal they went to the Supreme Court. What would it decide . . ?

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SOMEWHERE outside the office of the President of the United States an unusual commotion was disturbing the customary White House quiet. People seemed to be rushing about, stamping their feet heavily and shouting frantically and incoherently.

As the President arose to investigate the uproar, a group of violently agitated men burst into his office and dashed about, leaping up and down, stamping and gesticulating excitedly. Greatly surprised, the President recognized several gardeners from the White House grounds, the doorman, his own private secretary and other officials, apparently afflicted with mass insanity.

In a moment, he discovered the reason for their mad antics. They were trampling on ants, hordes of ants, thousands of ants, which were pouring through the door.

Up the walls to the ceiling swarmed

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the ants, leaving behind hundreds squashed on the floor, and the panting men paused to regain their composure.

"What's this all about?" asked the President, his handsome, careworn face marked by curiosity.

"I don't . . . know, sir," puffed his secretary. "These ants . . . invaded . . ."

"Yes, sir," spoke up a gardener. "We saw them come marching along like soldiers, heading right for the main entrance. Tried to stop them but they scattered and ran."

"Came right through the windows when I shut the doors, sir," offered the doorman. "Just couldn't head them off, there were so many."

The President's secretary frowned at the army of ants crawling about safely above their heads and then glared suspiciously at the gardeners. "This looks like someone's silly practical joke!"

Loud protestations of innocence agitated the atmosphere. "No, sir!" "We ain't responsible!" "I tell you they came here by themselves!" *"Look—!"*

All eyes swerved to the place indicated. On the ceiling the ants were arranging themselves into letters and words. While the amazed men stared incredulously, the insects lined up to form the word "Greetings!"

A moment after, they reshuffled themselves and formed two sentences. "Please do not molest us. We wish to see the President if he is not busy."

"I'm going nuts!" moaned someone. "I'm seeing things that can't be. Omigawd!"

This outcry was produced by the ants' rearranging themselves again into a new message. "If you wish to communicate with us, write on a piece of paper and put it on the floor."

THE first to recover from the general stupefaction was the President. With a smile of interest, he suggested, "Let's try it."

"But it's just somebody's foolish joke," his secretary repeated.

"If it's a joke, it's a good one and I'll see it through," remarked the President. On a blank sheet he printed, "I am the President. Who are you and what do you want?" Stooping his tall, slender figure, he placed the paper on the floor. Several ants immediately detached themselves from the others and crawled down and over the paper slowly. Then they climbed back, went into a huddle with their companions, rubbed antennae together vigorously, separated and took up positions in new words.

"We are a committee representing all the ants in the United States." After a quick redistribution, they continued, "And we have come to demand the right to vote."

A confused babble burst from the assembled men until the President raised his hand for silence. "Let's find out all we can," he declared, and wrote on another sheet of paper, "How is it you understand our language?"

After crawling on the writing to absorb its meaning, the ants replied, one sentence at a time. "Being very intelligent animals, we learned to read and spell by examining children's elementary reading books and dictionaries we found in a junk pile. Of course, we cannot speak or hear your voices, hence the need to communicate through writing. Now that we are literate, we demand our rights as native born American citizens and wish to participate in the government. This demand is also being made in each state legislature and in every city and town by other ants."

The President turned to one of his assistants. "Call the news services and check on that."

Meanwhile his secretary was scribbling furiously, "But you're not human

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beings!"

To this the ants calmly answered, "We have read the constitutions of each state and of the federal government, and nowhere do they restrict the right to vote to human beings exclusively."

"That's correct," chuckled the President, amused by his aide's discomfiture. "But there's a way around that." He wrote, "The constitutions specifically speak of 'persons' when talking of suffrage. Dictionaries define a person as a human being. Now, as you are not human beings you are also not persons, hence you cannot vote under present laws."

The ants pondered this a while. From their long conference emerged a reply. "That point will have to be adjudicated by the courts. Can you recommend a good firm of attorneys?"

"Well, of all the damned insolence!" gasped the secretary.

His spluttering comments were interrupted by the telephone. Still mumbling wrathfully, he listened to the message, his face running through all the colors of the rainbow.

"Same thing everywhere!" he exclaimed, banging the phone down disgustedly. "Ants demanding suffrage. Millions parading in the streets. Pfah!"

The President was frowning in deep thought. "So it's not a joke. We're up against something mighty big here, and the Supreme Court will have to render a decision without delay. Better get the Attorney-General at once."

His secretary paced nervously about the room. "Ants outnumber humans by millions to one," he protested. "Giving them votes would make us a tiny minority group. They'd control the country!"

Seizing a piece of paper, he scrawled, "What do you intend to do if you receive suffrage?"

"We have long been dissatisfied with the inefficient and wasteful social and economic organization of you so-called civilized people," said the ants. "With all your science, you are becoming more and more confused, inept and incompetent. When we control this country, we will establish an orderly, intelligent society such as we ants have had for many millions of years."

"But damn it!" scribbled the secretary, "we've never interfered in your lives. Why the hell should you butt into ours?"

The ants' answer was simple and succinct. "We have a mission to reform you."

The secretary swore vigorously. "Your ant civilization is not perfect. You have wars and slaves."

Unhesitatingly, the ants replied. "True. But our wars are really humane wars, without poison gas or secret treaties or bombing of civilians. And our slaves are not only well treated but they could not live at all if we did not take care of them."

A hearty laugh broke from the President. "They have an answer for everything. That's more than we sometimes have."

Continuing, the ants said: "We are excellent engineers, architects, agriculturists and herdsmen. We are far better economists than you because every ant has a job and enough to eat. We live together without laws, courts and police. We ants have no drunkards, thieves, politicians or lunatics; no moral troubles, no poverty, no swing bands, no fake stock salesmen and no taxes. We actually practice what we preach. Can you humans say the same? You will never eliminate all your faults and defects by yourselves, so we must do it for you. Good day."

Their indictment of human society completed, the ants climbed out the windows and disappeared.

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IN the ensuing weeks, the American people gradually recuperated from the shock of the ants' demands, which at first they regarded as a huge joke and then accepted as a matter of the greatest seriousness. Everyone's attention was held completely by the lawsuit in the Supreme Court, which set aside less important matters to give immediate consideration to the most portentous case ever to come before it: *Formica Hymenoptera,* the common ant, appellant *vs. the United States of America,* respondent.

On an historic Monday in July, the Court handed down its decision. A majority of six concurred in the Chief Justice's brief but weighty statements:

"Insofar as the accepted dictionary definition of a person as a human being is concerned, we are inclined to regard that definition as purely arbitrary and much too narrow. The Latin source of this word, *persona,* meant a face mask used by actors to help them assume a certain character. Hence the complete and broadest meaning of the English word *person* is a character, an individual, especially a sentient and intelligent individual.

"Regarded in this light, the word *person,* as used in state and federal constitutions and in state and federal laws governing the suffrage, must be extended to mean any individual capable of using the suffrage. Indeed, we find that such was the intention of the framers of these constitutions and laws, i.e., to grant the right to vote to anyone who could use it intelligently and honorably.

"That ants can so employ suffrage is beyond doubt. Their civilization is far superior to human civilization in many respects, as has frequently been described by human writers.

"The argument that ants are not citizens is without foundation. Those that are born on American soil are automatically citizens and as such are entitled to all the rights, privileges and prerogatives of citizenship.

"Moreover, it is a fundamental principle of our government, a principle arising from a great civil war and embodied in the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, that the right to vote cannot be denied to any citizen because of race, creed, color or previous condition of servitude.

"In view of these considerations, the decision of this Court is that there is nothing in any statute barring ants from exercising their constitutional right to vote.

"The appellant is upheld."

BURSTING upon an anxiously waiting nation, this decision set off an explosion which had slowly been brewing while the lordly human beings brooded over the insolence and conceitedness of these upstart ants. Everywhere in the press and on the radio and on street corners the Court was denounced for destroying human rights. In spontaneous demonstrations of respect for law and justice, enraged gangs raided and wrecked the homes and offices of the lawyers who had presented the ants' case. Other furious mobs went about jumping on every ant visible.

Groups of ants swarmed over the late afternoon papers, absorbing the headlines, and then raced away to spread the good news among their compatriots. Some hours later, a delegation of ants called on the President, bringing with them a number of bees and termites. They found the President and Cabinet in grave consultation with Congressional leaders. Of all the men, only the President seemed unperturbed. While the rest puffed and snorted and hissed like so many steam engines, the President appeared to be enjoying himself.

"Greetings to all!" saluted the ants.

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"Allow us to introduce our noble fellow creatures, *Apis Hymenoptera,* otherwise known as the bees, and *Termitdae Neuroptera,* the termites. They too wish to benefit by the Supreme Court's decision."

Angry mutters and mumbles erupted from the assembled officials. "Ridiculous!" "Damned impudence!" "I say to hell with them!" "Just let me get at them with a fly swatter!"

Ignoring their wrathful remarks, the President wrote, "All right. But first you must answer a question. Do you intend to obey all the laws of cities, states and nation, as is expected of good citizens?"

After crawling over his query, the ants, bees and termites promptly formed a huge "Yes!"

"Good," scribbled the President. "I shall at once send a message to the Congress requesting extension of the suffrage—."

The Secretary of War grasped the President's hand. "It's impossible!" he exploded. "It's . . . it's insane! We can't give them control of the country."

Unanimous agreement was expressed by the other cabinet members, while Representatives and Senators muttered they'd see those damn bugs in hell first before they voted any such thing, no matter what the Supreme Court said.

"Gentlemen, please!" smiled the President. "Let me finish." Quite calmly, he continued writing: " . . . extension of the suffrage to any ant, bee or termite who reaches the legal voting age of twenty-one years."

He placed the paper on the floor for the ants to read. Immediate consternation was clearly visible. The insects clustered in a palpitating heap from which they emerged only after a protracted consultation, forming an agonized protest: "But we don't live that long!"

The President grinned and turned to the Secretary of Agriculture, "How long do ants, bees and termites live, Bill?"

Sudden comprehension flooded the Secretary's face as the other men present joined in a loud guffaw of relief. Through the delighted jabber, the President's voice laughed, "I anticipated all this when Department of Agriculture entomologists told me that these insects never live more than a very few years."

SLOWLY recovering from their dismay, the insects reformed their lines to ask, "Couldn't the laws be changed to grant the right to vote to anyone half a year old? We're fully mature at that age."

"Sorry," replied the President, "but that would make voters out of millions of human children who are not yet able to vote intelligently. The law must stay as it is. It's up to you to conform to the law, if you can."

Once again the insects huddled together. That a furious debate was in progress among them was apparent from the agitated waving and rubbing of antennae. Coming out of conference, they rapidly lined up to issue a formal declaration and ultimatum:

"Whereas, human beings have shown themselves to be tricky and untrustworthy; and

"Whereas, human civilization is only a few thousand years old, while insect civilization is millions of years old; and

"Whereas, there are only 2,000,000,000 human beings alive at present, while the number of ants, bees and termites is more than 354,749,127,483,010,562,197,106,000,000,000,000; and

"Whereas, ants, bees and termites are noble, honorable, efficient and intelligent; and

"Whereas, human beings are incompetent, stupid, ignorant, uncouth, inept

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and befuddled;—

"Therefore the rightful lords of creation are not the human beings but the aforementioned ants, bees and termites; and

"Therefore the high and noble alliance of *Formica Hymenoptera, Apis Hymenoptera* and *Termitdae Neuroptera,* otherwise known as ants, bees and termites, hereby declare that a state of war exists between them and the genus *Homo Sapiens,* otherwise known as man."

And leaving their stupefied audience to gurgle and gasp at these statements, the allied insects turned and marched out, with dignity and decorum.

WITHIN a day, the war began in earnest. Hordes of ants descended upon the cities, invading them from every direction in overwhelming numbers. Wherever they encountered a luckless human, they swarmed up his or her legs, biting and chewing away lustily, while the agonized creature danced and slapped crazily. Millions of ants perished in these hand-to-hand encounters, but millions more arrived daily.

Then came the bees, stinging at everyone they could catch. Each sting meant a dead bee, but there were millions of bees. Usually they stung only that part of the human anatomy which was most stingable and which was most painfully recalled each time the person sat dawn, although they also stung other parts when they would be annoying. Thus, in one city, a candidate for a public office had to cancel a scheduled speech because a bee had stung his tongue. The citizenry of that town, though suffering from countless stings, issued a proclamation of thanks to the unknown heroic bee for its public service.

Then the termites arrived, to do sapping and undermining. From house to house they traveled, and when they departed no chair or table could be trusted, for the termites so cleverly chewed away legs and supports that the weak spots could not be detected until the furniture collapsed. Baseball games everywhere had to be cancelled when the termites ate the bats into uselessness. In one town, a great, dignified virtuoso appeared before thousands of eager, expectant music lovers, sat himself down before his five thousand dollar piano, gracefully struck one resounding chord, and most ungracefully crashed to the floor as the bench gave way. Another bench was brought, he reseated himself, struck again the resounding chord, and this time the piano collapsed, with a heart-rending, discordant twang of all its strings.

IN between raids, the insects propagandized. Wherever they could be seen, upon walls and on the streets ants gathered into slogans and battle-cries:

"Vote for Ants!"

"If Women Can Vote, Why Not Ants?"

"If You Don't Want Ants In Your Pants, Vote for Votes for Ants!"

And the bees flew overhead in similar formations:

"Be Good to the Bees and the Bees Will Be Good to You!"

"Votes for Bees or Stings for You. Take Your Choice!"

"If We Get Suffrage, You Won't Suffer!"

And the termites chewed out other appeals on wooden fences and walls:

"Termites Want Rights!"

"We Fight for Right
By Day and Night!"

"If We Get Our Rights,
You Won't Get Our Bites!"

During the early days of the conflict, when human resistance was haphazard

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cted as shock troops, heavy
d air fleet combined. To
out, billions of flowers were
with very little effect.
ties, towns and villages, air-
were installed and lookout
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Vhen approaching swarms of
sighted, up from the nearest
ose squadrons of army air-
med with great power-driv-
guns to give battle, while in the
e sirens wailed, warning every-
ush indoors to sanctuary. As
came crawling down chimneys
ugh cracks and gaps in doors
lows, *swoosh! swoosh! swoosh!*
ndreds of spray guns as thou-
bees bit the dust. But they
ing and coming and coming un-
uns were exhausted; and then
heir turn to swarm up on the
, squirming, wailing humans un-
found openings through which
ld sting and sting and sting till
rtunate men and women were
to moaning wrecks, groaning
ca and alcohol and ammonia
d menthol. Drug stores laid in
plies of these soothing medi-
ut an ocean of menthol would
e eased the aches and pains of
g humanity.

OUGHOUT the war, the insects
entrated especially heavy at-
n a few people, the leaders of
labor, politics and religion,
nfluence could sway public opin-
hese were harassed to their wit's
lespite careful protection by
us guards armed with the larg-
most deadly spray guns. After
sault and before retreating, the
momentarily formed themselves
ssages offering to spare the vic-
ther attacks if he would promise
for insect suffrage.

But the persistent attacks had just the opposite result. These national leaders grew more and more determined never to surrender and to fight to a finish. Faced with this common enemy, they forgot the issues over which they had previously battled fiercely and drew together to aid each other against the insects.

Sensing this growing feeling of the brotherhood of man, the President summoned a great conference of all opposed parties to join in a united front against the common enemy. The day of the conference was an historic occasion. Lifelong political opponents posed for photographs together. Democrats and Republicans sang "For he's a jolly good fellow!" to each other and got drunk together and swapped remedies for bites and stings. All differences and quarrels were forgotten as radicals and reactionaries, liberals and conservatives, employers and employees alike rallied to the common cause.

Up before the friendly gathering of the nation's notables arose the President, amid tumultuous cheers. Rapping for silence, he spoke joyously and pointedly.

"Ah, my friends, if we can thus forget party lines and class interests when faced by a common enemy, why cannot we do likewise when battling those other enemies we call economic problems, which have defeated us for so long?"

Uproarious shouts of approval and deafening volleys of applause thundered through the chamber. "We can!" "We will!" "We're all behind you!" "Atta boy!"

When the tumult subsided, the President continued. "It has been said that a little child shall lead them. Well, today a little *bug* shall lead *us* . . ."—he paused, waiting for the laughter that rippled over the multitude to abate—

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and ineffectual, the insects won victory after victory. Then rapid organization transformed the nation into an efficient fighting force, evening the balance of power. First protective measures were adopted. Men and women abandoned their traditional clothing, which left too many openings for the insects, and adopted breeches with tight boots, coats with tight sleeves, thick gloves and heavy nets covering the head. To meet the enormous demand for such articles, the Government commandeered all clothing factories and put them to work at maximum capacity, while squads of chemists sought means of making cloth impervious to bee stings.

Then came counter-attack! Declaring a national emergency, the President assumed control of all industry and set it to manufacturing millions of spray guns and tons of insecticides. Within a month, everyone was armed with a spray gun. Department stores featured a dainty little half-pint model with gem-studded handle for milady's evening use, but most people preferred the more substantial two-quart size, complete with belt and a gallon of insecticide, $2.98. After some experimentation, the War Department brought out a much more efficient multi-fire spray gun with a dozen nozzles which shot the liquids in all directions. Also popular was a battery-powered gun with a motorized pump, guaranteed to surround its owner with an impenetrable shower of bug-killer. Every filling station added a tank of insecticide to its row of gas tanks.

When this counter-attack was launched, the ants sent a delegation to the Secretary of State, protesting that insecticide sprays were the equivalent of poison gases and as such were outlawed by international agreement. The delegation was gruffly dismissed by the Secretary who reminded them they had de-

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". . . shall lead us to a new era of brotherhood and universal good spirits and united effort for everyone's good! And after we win this war, we will go right on working together until we solve all our other problems!"

A roaring chorus of cheers reverberated from wall to wall, and the President thrilled at the wonderful demonstration of amity and harmony and willingness to cooperate.

With a tremor in his voice, he went on: "Then here is what I propose that we—"

A terrific shriek ripped through his words. *"Ants!"*

IN through the open door poured a vast mob of ants and bees and termites. All over the auditorium, men swore and hastily reached for their guns, but the insects quickly swept up onto the walls and formed into a friendly greeting.

"Peace! We want an armistice."

The hubbub faded to a mere clamor. All eyes stared fixedly at the announcement appearing above their heads:

"Peace! The Grand Supreme Council of Ants, Bees and Termites has a message. To wit:—

"Whereas, in four months of war the number of ants, bees and termites has been reduced almost to half; and

"Whereas, it is now clear that you human beings wish to persist in your foolishness, wastefulness, inefficiency and general incompetence; and

"Whereas, you have consistently failed to appreciate our sincere efforts to reform you and show you the error of your ways; and

"Whereas, our anthropologists have just proven that on the evolutionary scale man is only slightly higher than the bacteria, so that human beings are not worth saving anyway,

"Therefore be it decreed that the ants, bees and termites shall hereafter mind their own business; and

"To hell with you."

Having delivered this expression of high regard, the insects reassembled into military formation and marched away forever.

Astonished silence reigned over the flabbergasted gathering a full minute. Then up leaped a prominent leader of the opposition party.

"A fine thing it is for human beings to be insulted by a bunch of insects! By bugs!" he bellowed. "And who is responsible? *You!"* He pointed an accusing finger at the President. "You and your fumbling and your hesitation! Now if *my* party had been in power, we'd have won this war in a week!"

"That's a lie!" shouted an Administration Senator. "It was you who spoiled everything because you wouldn't cooperate!"

"Ridiculous! I demand you retract that!"

"I'll retract nothing, you fathead!"

"You bum! I'll kick your ribs in!"

"Sock him! Atta boy!"

"Down with them!"

"Who hit me? Listen, wise guy—"

"Why, you—!"

"I'll mow you down!"

"Yeah, you and what army—*ow!"*

Through the wild turmoil came the President's ineffective appeal for quiet, a mere sigh in the storm. In a second the hundreds of sedate, dignified ladies and gentlemen were transformed into kicking, screeching, punching, scratching hoodlums. They scarcely knew why they were fighting but they had to do something to relieve their feelings. And so the brief era of good spirit ended in a free-for-all that made pandemonium seem halcyon.

Brotherhood broke up in a riot.

The United States was back to normal.

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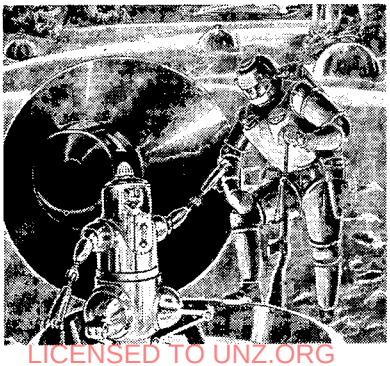

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